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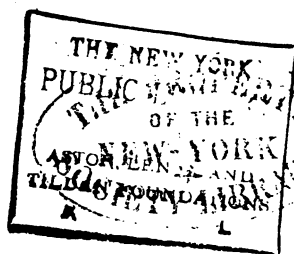
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ST. JOHN'S WOOING

A Story

BY

M. G. McCLELLAND

AUTHOR OF

"OBLIVION" "PRINCESS" "BURKETT'S LOOK"
"WHITE HERON" "BROADOAKS" ETC.

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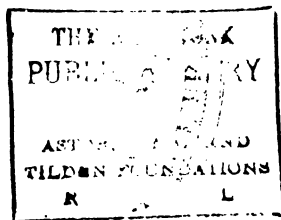
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ST. JOHN'S WOODING

He was an Englishman, but not at all arrogant, and he had been in the country twelve years, drifting about from point to point, always hopeful, always unsuccessful, always obedient to his nomadic instincts. His name was Clere St. John. He had tried America, in its western half, from Vancouver's Island to the Staked Plains, and could make nothing of it. His business associates were wont to affirm that this was entirely due to the fact of his not knowing what he was fit for; to his being, in brief, a round peg with an astonishing facility for getting himself into square holes.

When this opinion had, by repetition, crystallized into formula, St. John ceased resent-

ing it. More: being truthful even with himself, he began to admit that the testimony of witnesses might establish a verity. He had certainly been no good at mining, no good at vine or fruit culture, no good at lumbering, or merchandising, or speculating, or at the rearing of ostriches. He had tried them all, and devoted to the discovery of his incapacity to cope with their conditions twelve years of his manhood and all of his available capital. And still, at five-and-thirty, the problem of his legitimate work in the world and the proper method of getting himself into position for doing it remained unsolved.

"What the dickens *am* I fit for?" he demanded of himself with asperity, one afternoon, as he sat alone on the veranda of a railway hotel in middle Arizona.

Three weeks previous, with mutual joy, he and his last business partner had dissolved connection, so that St. John found himself his own man once more, plus \$100 in cash, and the world before him where to choose.

"I haven't struck the right combination yet," he ruminated, "which seems odd, con-

sidering the diligence I've manifested in seeking it. Perhaps it's the sections I've tried which are unpropitious. That conclusion pats *amour propre* on the back, and is vastly pleasanter than the notion that I haven't sense enough to discover my aptitudes. I shall adopt it *con amore*, for it's a deuced deal easier to change an environment than a character. Hang it all! I'll trot around a bit more on the chance of finding the home pasture."


An indignant chirp from a flower-bed beside the veranda steps attracted his attention, and he leaned his elbows on the railing and looked over. An English sparrow had discovered an alluring bit of string attached to one of the straggling geraniums and was minded to have it for building purposes. His little legs were planted wide apart, with the toes braced; his wings were half open, and his tail spread; he turned and twisted and rocked backwards and forwards, pulling with all his might. The stalk shook and bent with the strain, but the string held fast. Finding he could make nothing of it, the bird slacked up a moment, scratched his

head with his claw, and squatted down to think, twittering low in his throat very sulkily.

St. John laughed.

"That's it, old fellow," he recommended. "Curse a bit. 'Twill ease your muscles and your mind. Then, when you're through slanging and have got your second wind, have at it again. For the honor of England, my lad, don't let a bit of Yankee string beat you."

A little native wren, trim-built and saucy, who had been watching the performance from a twig hard by, now fluttered down close, and, apparently, proffered advice and suggestion in an amiable twitter. The English bird received it with contempt, cocking his eye viciously, flirting his tail, and uttering a quarrelsome note or two, as though bidding his counsellor mind his own business, or go to the devil. Then, as if to demonstrate that he felt himself quite sufficient for the matter in hand, the sparrow hopped up to the geranium stalk, examined it closely for a sappy place, pounded it thoroughly with his beak, grabbed the string



again, spread his wings wider, and hopped backward, jerking with all his strength. Over came the stalk, sawed through at the base, and over tumbled the bird, flat on his back, but with the released string in his beak. The wren puffed out his feathers, ducked down his head, and burst out into a derisively mirthful whistle, which so incensed the sparrow that he gathered himself up and offered battle wrathfully, tweaking a feather out of the wren's pert little tail, and hurling it at him. The wren departed in consternation, leaving the victorious foreigner to execute a war-dance of triumph with the feather in his beak. When satisfied with this performance, the sparrow dropped his trophy again and returned to business, chirping lustily the while. The string was long and a bit unwieldy, but he grabbed it pluckily by the middle and bore it away to a honeysuckle in a neighboring yard, where doubtless he boastfully related the story of its acquisition to the lady of his household.

"That's as good an object-lesson as the Bruce's spider," was St. John's inward comment. "I'll try another fall with fortune

immediately, but with an amendment. The next thing I clinch I'll hold to." He sat quiet a while, whistling "Ye wives o' Merrie England" under his breath; then he rose and stretched himself. "Heigh-ho! this is very dull! Here I've been for a week and nothing's happened. I wonder if the post is in? My mail was to be forwarded, and it's about time her ladyship honored me. I wish she'd let up on that matrimonial business though."

He betook himself to the clerk's office and found there a couple of letters awaiting him; both forwarded from his late address. One bore the English post-mark, the other that of an unimportant town in Texas. St. John returned with them to his chair on the veranda.

The English letter received first attention. It was from his sister, Lady Wolcott, and contained all the home intelligence, in detail, given with the sprightliness and *savoir faire* of a woman of the world. St. John pored over the closely written pages with keen interest and a twinge of homesickness. How jolly it all was! how attractive, how finely finished! Even the perfume exhaled by the thin, bluish, crested paper touched memory

and awakened association. How he longed for it all, setting it in contrast with the crude, almost elementary, life of the past dozen years—the crass, unfinished surroundings. Stay ; here was a summons back to it.

“When are you coming to see us?” demanded the written page. “Surely in twelve years you must have made money enough to afford a visit home. I long to show you my boys—the babies you left in petticoats—grown to be great, manly, public-school fellows. Leave your partner to regulate affairs for a while, and come you home to embrace your family. My Harry, as usual, takes pessimistic views of this new venture of yours, and vows you’ll make nothing of it, because of the trouble on the South African ostrich farms last season. I tell him that can’t possibly apply to California, and that mortality among the African birds may increase the value and the profit of the American. He still shakes his head, however, thinking lightly of my logic; so come over and convince him yourself that this time you really *have* been judicious.”

St. John laid the letter on his knee and

gazed away to the southwest, where the Sierras lay purple against the sky, with a curiously regretful expression in his eyes.

"Not yet, Maudie," he pondered ; "not yet a while, dear girl. I haven't been judicious, and have had the devil's luck in consequence. We'll leave it, dear, for, after all that's been said and predicted, I can't go home a failure. Harry shakes his head, does he? He'll nod it like a mandarin, with triumph, when he hears the ostrich business has gone to pot, too. Hanged if I tell him a word about it, or Maudie either. There's Tom, too, with the bulk of the family estate in his pocket, would be wagging *his* head in addition and recommending me to *recoup* myself with a cotton-spinner's daughter. No, friends, I'll knock about a bit longer trying for a big pot, keeping the ocean neatly between me and family comment. 'Twill be more wholesome. Brothers and brothers-in-law are all very well at a distance, but close at hand they've a nasty habit of being hard on failure. I'd like well to see Maudie and her boys though — uncommonly well. But it can't be yet a while. I came to the States to

make a big strike, and here I'll stay till I make it, or go under altogether."

Then he addressed himself to his letter again. There were still four closely written pages to read.

"Have you thought over what I said in my last letter about that step-uncle of ours?" questioned Lady Wolcott. "And, more than all, have you taken any steps towards tracking him up? I told you of finding his photo in the Book of Revelations in papa's Bible, last spring, when I was hunting up a date. It's a faded old thing, but very gentlemanly looking. Last week I took it down to Marsh Mallow Hall and showed it to Tom. Tom was six years old when Uncle Clere went to the States, and remembers him distinctly—a fine, soldierly man, he was, Tom says, and devoted to papa, his half-brother. We rummaged over his old letters in papa's desk, and found that he settled first in Virginia—owned a plantation there and slaves. During the Civil War he fought for the Confederacy; was a colonel in their army. After the war, Uncle Clere seems to have become disgusted with the way things were going in Virginia, and sold out

and moved to the Southwest somewhere. He mentions this in the last letter I can find, one written shortly before papa's death, but he doesn't say to what portion of the country he was going. Says 'I'll write again when I've located.' Since papa's death, you know, none of us have troubled our heads about him, although *you* should have done so, being his namesake, and for the last dozen years right in the same country with him. Do hunt him up, Clere, without any more loss of time! His letters are those of a prosperous man, and he may be able to do something handsome for you. Who knows? You always neglect your chances so that I'm quite in despair about you. Any other man would have hunted up Uncle Clere inside of twelve months, and you've let twelve years slip by without an effort to find him. It all comes back to what I always say—you need a woman at your back to look out for you. You'll never make a success of your life until you marry. Some horses, you know, are nothing in single harness, and yet work splendidly in a span. There really must be some nice, clever girl in America with beauty and wealth,

who would be glad of a chance to ally herself with your sweet temper and the St. John blood. American women, when they have money and looks, are the rage here, and some of them are really very nice. They've a *penchant* for Englishmen, too, and from all I can hear make very fair wives. Do find yourself a rich, pretty, well-bred girl, and marry her, Clere. You are five-and-thirty, you know, and, perhaps, are even getting gray. Papa did at thirty. You'll be twice the man with a wife to look after you, and if she should be even moderately presentable I'll take her up. A wife would be the making of you all around."

St. John put the letter back into its envelope a trifle impatiently. This constant harping on material advantages to be brought about by marriage vexed him. It seemed to brush the bloom from the grape, to reduce that which is highest to a business basis. He was past his first youth, but had not outlived youth's reverence for romance. His whole being revolted from the unloveliness of the *mariage de convenance*.

The reference to his step-uncle interested him more nearly, and he pulled out Lady

Wolcott's letter again, and read that part of it over, noticing now a marginal note in which the lady stated, evidently as an after-thought, her intention of dropping a line to Mr. Griffith, their family solicitor, lest haply he might have more recent tidings of the missing kinsman. The result of this inquiry she would forward later, should it prove of interest or importance, Lady Wolcott said.

When the existence of this long-lost-sight-of relative had first been brought to his notice, St. John had vaguely determined to "hunt the old boy up some day," but beyond that he had done nothing. His individual affairs absorbed his attention, and America is a big place to track down a man in—especially on the insufficient data given in Lady Wolcott's first epistle. He had known all his life that his grandmother had been twice married, and also that the son of the first union—Clere Lawless—a man of whom his own father was fond—had emigrated to America before he himself had been born. But beyond that he had known nothing, nor had he troubled himself to inquire. This last letter of Maudie's put mat-

ters in better shape, for a colonel of the Confederacy must be more easily identified than an utterly undistinguished individual.

"I wish the old boy 'd take a notion to hunt *me* up," meditated St. John. "I'm lots easier tracked up than he will be in this country of no family solicitors."

By a singular coincidence this was exactly what Colonel Lawless had been about ; proving that a sequence of thought operating from diverse starting-points may happily meet at a common centre. St. John opened his second letter carelessly, but in less than a moment straightened up in his chair with every faculty at attention. It was dated from a place called Marsh Mallow Ranch, in Texas, and its contents was as follows :

"To Mr. CLERE ST. JOHN, Tahoia, Cal. :

"DEAR NEPHEW,—A Californian, named Thomlins, stopped at my ranch six months ago, and in the course of conversation mentioned an ostrich farm started near him by a Vermont Yankee and an Englishman—a Devonshire man—called Clere St. John. Now that name and locality coming to-

gether set me thinking, for I'm Devon myself, and had (God rest his soul!) a half-brother named St. John, who was dear to me. The upshot of the matter is, that I wrote home to Griffiths, the family solicitor, to make inquiries, and I find that my brother Tom's son—the little chap he named after me—has been within hail of me, so to speak, for many years, and I not knowing it. My own fault, you will say, for dropping the home ties, and you'll be in the right. But after Tom's death I didn't feel near to anybody in the old country; his children were strangers, and my own interests all on this side, and so the drifting came about. We'll mend it now, lad, if you're willing, and will set your own matters aside and come down to my ranch for a visit. I don't stir around much myself any more, because of a wound I've got, and also the oncoming of age. Let me hear from you at earliest convenience, and make the answer affirmative. I'll like rarely well to shake Tom's boy by the hand, and chat a bit over old Devon days. Affectionately, your uncle,

“CLERE LAWLESS.”

St. John laid the letter open on his knee, and slapped his hand down on it amusedly.

"Talk of brain-waves" quoth he to himself. "Here's a case of it, with a vengeance. 'We think o' he—he o' we,' and presto! a connection is established. To think of the old chappie writing to Griffith for information—just what Maudie was going to do. There must be a precious deal in common between those two to set them conjuring simultaneously, and along the same lines. Fifty years ago they'd have earned a stake apiece, and faggots. A good job for them that these are the days of psychic research, and folks don't scare easy. To think of the pair of them, with no previous knowledge of each other, or collusion, and an ocean between them, joining issue on *me*, so successfully! It beats out Blavatsky with the tea-cups and roses." Then his thought took a turn. "Poor Uncle Clere! he seems to have cared a good deal for my father, which makes it incumbent on my father's son to gratify him in this matter of acquaintance. I'll hie me down to Texas, and give the wheel of fortune another spin. It may twirl to luck this time. Who knows?"

II

"MISS JUDY!"

"Well, Nat."

"Ole Dick's down—*flat!* I dunno what ails him."

"Good gracious! Where are the men?"

"Off to the round-up—every jack-rabbit of 'em. Left afore sun-up."

"That's awful! What ever shall we do? Run back to the corral, Nat, and *make* him get up. Is he locoed, do you think?"

"Nary time! Locoed creeters play high-jinks, an' Dick's quiet as a steer—down on his side an' trimblin' like agur fits. Dad had a mustang eat loco weed once an' three men couldn't hold him, he had such connip-shuns."

"Truly? This can't be loco then. Scamper back to the corral, Nat, and wait for me. We must do *something*. I won't be a minute."

Then came the sound of a leap out of bed,



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the opening and shutting of drawers, and a general skurry of preparation.

The messenger of evil, a freckled, tow-headed imp of twelve, the son of one of the cowboys, and the special factotum of Miss Judith Fontaine, the proprietor's daughter, hearkened a moment, then quitted the gallery with a whoop and sped back towards the corral.

The sun was just showing himself above the rim of the prairie, dull red and sulky, as though the other side of the world had been too much for his nerves. He blinked at, rather than shone upon, the quaint, white adobe mansion, with its red-tiled roof and surrounding outer gallery. The inner court-yard was still dusk with shadow, and, since the riding forth, half an hour before, of Henry Fontaine, with his following of native *vaqueros* and imported cowboys, had relapsed into silence and slumber. Besides the boy, Nat Thomas, there were only women left about the house. And wherefore not? since the men would return by moonrise, perhaps, and the only creatures in the house corral to be cared for were a couple of kittenish colts, whose dams had gone to the round-up, and a sedate mid-

dle-aged mule with a swelled leg, who weighed eighteen hundred pounds, and was supposed to be able to look out for himself. As though to prove the weakness of all human calculation, this mule now lay upon his side in a corner of the corral, trembling like an aspen in a breeze, his countenance distressed with pain, and his huge ears cold and flopping. His afflicted leg was outstretched to its limit, but the other three were doubled under him in a helpless sort of fashion. He held his head up still, but in a melancholy position; and to Nat's suggestions about getting up he paid no sort of heed, beyond backing his ears irritably and switching his stump tail about in reprobation.

Judy came running into the corral, at speed, with a stout quart bottle in her hand. Her brown hair was clubbed into a fluffy knot on the top of her head, and her winsome face was filled with anxiety. She had not taken time to dress, but had come in her dressing-gown, with her little bare feet thrust into scarlet slippers. She was an impulsive young woman, brimming over with energy and the out-reaching to helpfulness.

"Is he very bad?" she demanded, hastening forward.

"I dunno 'm," Nat answered. "He won't get up, all I can do."

"He must—he *shall*! Get a bridle and put it on him. He'll obey the bit from habit. Poor old Dicky! What hurts you? Can't you make mistress understand? Make haste, Nat!"

The mule sucked in his breath and gave it out again in a sigh of pain; he drooped his head until his muzzle rested on the ground, and fell a-trembling again worse than ever.

"Hurry up Nat! for Heaven's sake! He's going to faint, or die, or something!"

They got the bridle on him, and, under its coercion, the mule dragged himself to his feet, but contrived to look sicker standing than he had lying down.

"Maybe he's got cramp, Nat," suggested the young lady. "If he has he ought to be drenched with something. I know that much, and here's a quart of whiskey. Whiskey is bound to be good for cramps—people take it. Carmelita always does. Let's give it to him. Do you know how?"

Nat grinned and nodded.

"I've helped Dad drench horses," he admitted. "But he never give 'em whiskey. He stewed up roots to a strong tea an' drenched with that. Or he give 'em turpentine."

"How much?"

"I ain't never noticed."

"There it is!" impatiently, "and while we are hesitating this poor creature suffers. There! see, he wants to lie down again. Something must be done at once, or he'll die. Keep him up, Nat. I'm going to give him this whiskey."

"Come on then," grinned Nat. "We all got to take him to a tree an' hold his head up, or he won't swallow wuth a cent."

The ranch was an old one, and trees about the house were abundant. They led the mule to a low-branching pecan, which Nat climbed nimbly. Straddling a limb securely, he threw the reins over one higher and drew the beast's head up to the limit of his throat, holding him helpless, and within proper range for further operations. Then he skilfully inserted the neck of the bottle into the tooth-

less vacancy at the side of the mule's mouth and began to pour. Judy watched the performance anxiously from the ground.

"He isn't swallowing a bit," she exclaimed, indignantly; "he's just holding it in his mouth. He hasn't gulped once. Swallow, you idiot, swallow, this minute!"

Nat kept pouring, and the liquor dribbled in a tiny stream down the outside of the animal's brown throat.

"That won't do," Nat observed, disgustedly. "The truck's just wastin'. Thar ought to be somebody to rub his gullet down an' sort of fumble it under his chin to *make* him swallow. Dad allus has help in drenchin';" he looked at the girl doubtfully, and then cast his glance abroad, seeking more stalwart assistance.

Judy pushed up the sleeves of her dressing-gown and advanced at once. She was not at all timid about beasts, and hated to see anything suffer.

"Tell me what to do, and I'll do it," she said, valiantly.

But Nat had his eye on a horseman who was travelling the prairie just beyond the

hacienda enclosures. Some belated cowboy on his way to the round-up, he concluded, and, on the impulse of the moment, sent his voice out in a shout for assistance.

Judy, meanwhile, having glanced over her shoulder to see who her assistant was hailing, had fallen to work on the mule's gullet, and was massaging to the limit of her ability. In a moment she proudly announced that the creature had swallowed, and Nat proceeded to pour again. So busy and excited were they over this unexpected success that they neglected to notice that the horseman had heard, and was responding to Nat's summons. He rode to the enclosure, dismounted, and joined the group quite unheeded, for Nat was giving the bottle a final tilt, the last drops were gurgling to the place where they would do the most good, and Judy's little white hands were chasing one another up and down the mule's throat with energy.

The lace and ribbons of her dressing-gown had loosened, leaving her pretty rounded throat and a bit of her white neck exposed; the sleeves had slipped above the elbows, showing the white flesh of the forearms and

the roguish little dimples which played in and out, at wrist and elbow, with her energetic movements. Her eyes were alight with sympathy and interest; her lips were parted; the exercise had stained her cheeks with carmine. Altogether she made a winsome picture standing under the chin of the ungainly brown brute, and Clere St. John appreciated it, from the knot of fluffy hair to the naked slippered feet.

"Let me do that for you," he said, regardless of preliminary courtesies.

Judy moved aside at once.

"He's swallowed it all pretty well," she said. "But perhaps it would be better to rub his poor old throat a little more."

Instinctively, she huddled her laces close at her own throat, and held them, at the same time covering her feet. She recognized St. John's social status at the first glance; but cowboys, who were also gentlemen born, were no novelty in that region, so that she proceeded to explain the situation without the faintest embarrassment.

"All the men have gone to the round-up," she informed him, "and this creature took

it upon him to be ill. We were frightened out of our wits, Nat and I, but we've dosed him well, and I think he'll be better soon. Let his head down, Nat. Why, he looks better already."

"What did you give him?" St. John inquired, regarding the animal critically.

"Whiskey. A whole quart," indicating the bottle with pride.

St. John strangled a desire to laugh, and glanced up at Nat, who was dangling his legs from the pecan limb and grinning from ear to ear.

"I tole Miss Judy I never hearn o' drenching with whiskey," the boy giggled.

"Was it wrong?" Judy demanded, addressing herself directly to St. John. "Will it kill him?"

"By no means," St. John answered. "It'll make him feel foolish ~~after~~ a bit, but it won't hurt him. A mule has no character to lose. Now, this leg, *I* should say, was the trouble," indicating the swelling. "It looks pretty painful. Have you any liniment or turpentine—either will do. It ought to be rubbed and fomented. I'll fix it for you, with pleasure."

Nat was despatched to the house on another medical quest, and, during his absence, St. John improved the opportunity by making some inquiries as to Marsh Mallow Ranch, which he was beginning to regard as an *ignis fatuus*. He had left the railway a hundred miles below, and staged to a prairie town called Dundalk, said to be only fifty miles from the ranch in question. Here, being enamoured of the clever device of taking his kindred by surprise, he had bought a mustang, and since the previous morning had been riding by verbal directions, with quite the customary result.

"As far as I can see, I'm imitating the White Queen in *Alice*," he smiled. "I seem to be 'going as fast as I can to stay in one place.' Every question gets the same answer—about ten miles along; not that I've had much chance for questions, however. And I travel that ten and ten to it, and don't get any nearer. *This* can't be Marsh Mallow?" looking at her rather eagerly.

Judy shook her head.

"Marsh Mallow Ranch is over there," she said, pointing southwest.

"Ten miles?"

The girl laughed.

"Eight this time. It's beyond that ridge. See—there where the prairie lifts to the skyline. There's a cañon over there, and a watercourse. Marsh Mallow is beyond. Colonel Lawless joins us thereaway."

She was taking stock of the young fellow while she spoke, wondering who he could be. Nat had unceremoniously halted a traveller! She began to be conscious of her deficiencies of toilet. Strangely enough, too, the face began to seem familiar in contour and expression. Who did this stranger remind her of? St. John himself dissipated that little mystery ere it was well formulated.

"Colonel Lawless is my uncle," he explained; "or, rather, my half-uncle, my father being the son of a second marriage. My name is St. John, and I am on my way to Marsh Mallow to make my kinsman's acquaintance. He left home—left England, I mean—before I was born." For some unexplainable reason he felt eagerly explicit. "I'm glad you are neighbors," he added.

The young lady waived that point.

"You are like your uncle," she said. "I noticed something familiar about you at once, and see now that it's your resemblance to Colonel Lawless. Here's Nat with the liniment. Are you sure it won't trouble you to fix Dick's leg? Nat can do it, you know, under your direction."

She hesitated an instant, and then, obedient to her hospitable instincts, invited him to remain and breakfast with them.

"My aunt, Mrs. Lestrangle, will welcome you in my father's place," she observed, as sedately as though she were not confronting him in dressing-gown and slippers. "Nat will attend to your horse, and all things else that are needful. The breakfast-bell will ring in half an hour. *Au revoir!*"

And "*au revoir!*" St. John repeated, well pleased with himself, with her, and with the prospect of a substantial morning meal.

III

BREAKFAST was served in a long, low-browed apartment, with wide lattices opening on a garden which, under the October sun, was a blaze of beauty and color. Luxuriant Madeira vines and climbing roses rioted over trellises and leaped from them upward into the arms of fig and pecan trees. Thickets of strange cacti huddled under tropical-looking bananas, thrusting abroad distorted limbs, weirdly glowing at the joints with flame-colored and carmine blossoms. Caladiums, begonias, cyclomens, and coleus in manifold variety mingled tinted foliage in a gorgeous harlequinade of contrasting hues and harmonious shadings; while above their radiant masses tall cannas uplifted spikes of scarlet, red, and orange flowers. Mingled with these, contesting supremacy in variety and beauty of color, were mats of verbenas, spreading themselves, like glorious Oriental rugs, over



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the walks and the little grass-plots. Near the centre of the garden a fountain cast its jet aloft to wanton in the sunlight, or to coyly slant aside, in myriad rainbow flashings, at the instance of each vagrant breeze. Beyond the garden were groups of hackberry, cottonwood, and umbrella trees, and beyond again the limitless stretch of the prairie.

Judy, decorously gowned and shod, with a bunch of roses at her trim belt and a smile of hilarity upon her countenance, met her guest in the hall, and marshalled him into the breakfast-room, where she presented him to an elderly lady. The latter had a face of great beauty and trailing garments of black, and, having been instructed aforehand, received him with grace, and that perfection of cordiality which converts an unceremonious happening into a pleasant matter of course.

St. John, feeling his British shyness dissolve like frost in sunlight, stoutly endeavored to be responsive. He succeeded so well that, by the time old Carmilita, the half-breed cook, had sent in the last batch of *tortillas*, or St. John himself had conquered the

fire of his first *tamale*, the two were chatting like old acquaintances; and many items of interest connected with the Fontaine and Lestrangle family history had passed into the stranger's keeping.

For instance, St. John learned that his absent host, Henry Fontaine, was a widower of twenty years' standing, that Judy was his only child, and that the combination of physical circumstances which had presented him with the one joy had deprived him of the other. By which he made out to his entire satisfaction that Miss Fontaine could have no recollection of her mother, and also that she must be twenty years of age. Then he incidentally discovered that Mrs. Lestrangle was not the childless relic her garments seemed to indicate, but possessed a stalwart, sea-going husband addicted to long absences and the South American coast trade, and a couple of equally stalwart sons who dutifully emulated the paternal methods. During her temporary widowhoods—that is, about two-thirds of her time—Mrs. Lestrangle visited in the interior at her brother's ranch, and during the remaining third she visited at her own house

in Galveston. That her sombre robes were apart from affliction and death, and worn because she deemed them becoming, St. John figured out for himself.

After breakfast Judy took him into the garden. St. John seized the opportunity to free his mind of some burning questions relative to his little-known kinsman. Within doors he had been too much occupied in receiving impressions of another sort to pay heed to his own affairs. Now, he collared his subject after the British manner, with a straight thrust and no unnecessary preamble.

"See here, Miss Fontaine," he said, as they paused beside the fountain, "I wish you'd coach me a bit about Marsh Mallow. I'm Colonel Lawless's step-nephew, and on my way to visit him, but I really know precious little about him. Can't you enlighten me? His letter of invitation is aggravatingly devoid of personal information. You can see for yourself, if you like"—he drew the misive from his pocket and presented it to her.

Judy seated herself on the grass beside the fountain and began throwing bread-crumbs into the basin for the goldfish.

"What do you wish to know?" she inquired.

"First, is there any family? My uncle mentions none. Then, what manner of man is Colonel Lawless himself?"

Judy took the questions in order.

"There is a daughter and a son," she said, laying the colonel's letter, unread, on the grass beside her. "The daughter is married to a Spanish-American and lives at home. Her husband is a literary man and a cripple. It was sad about him. When he went for his license to be married to Miss Lawless, a long journey, ten years ago, it was to the courthouse; his horse frightened and ran away, breaking the buggy into kindling-wood, and throwing Colonel Lawless and Luis Mejares both out on the rocky edge of a cañon. Colonel Lawless escaped with a few bruises, but Mejares had both legs broken. Bringing him home made matters worse, and then a young doctor they fished up from somewhere in a hurry mismanaged the case, so that the bones knit badly. Mr. Mejares used crutches for a while, but he began to lay on flesh about five years ago, as people of Spanish blood

are prone to do, and got too heavy for it to be safe. He uses a wheeled chair now, and gets about more comfortably. He writes charming stories, and has quite a reputation. Perhaps you know his work."

"Perhaps I do," he assented; "I read lots of stories as I go along, but I don't always notice the author's name, or remember it when I do notice. It's a good thing this poor fellow has a profession which doesn't require legs. I'm glad my cousin had the pluck to carry on the engagement."

Judy looked up at him with wide-open eyes of inquiry.

"What pluck was required?" demanded she, in surprise. "She loved Mr. Mejares devotedly. It was a love-match from the beginning, for her father would have preferred an Englishman for her, and there were plenty in Texas, even ten years ago. Mejares got hurt going for his license to wed *her*, moreover; so of *course* Miss Lawless felt responsible, and as if she could never make it up. She married him the minute his legs were set, standing in her white dress among the bottles and bandages. She had to do that,

you know, so as to take chief part in the nursing."

St. John looked approval. Maudie's house of cards as to a possible heirship for himself had tumbled into ruins, as such structures have a malicious habit of doing. He had given that aspect of the matter small thought himself, so that this news of a family at Marsh Mallow had no poignant sting. It was pleasant to know that his kinsfolk were creditable.

"How about the son?" he queried, briskly. "Is he distinguished and literary too?"

A shade of reserve crept into the girl's manner at once; her face chilled, and she followed the movements of the goldfish, darting about the floating bread-crumbs, assiduously with her glance.

"The son is away most of the time," she answered, non-committally. "He is a mining-engineer, and his field of work lies elsewhere."

St. John looked at her curiously, feeling suddenly confident that a little investigation along this line might develop matter of interest. Inquiries burned on his tongue, but

there was that in the girl's manner which caused him to restrain his curiosity, and to remember that their acquaintance was accidental, and should not be made the means of pushing the young lady into a false position. Why should she, an outsider, be entrapped into telling a man discreditable tales—if such there should be—about his own kindred? Clearly she had no intention of being so entrapped, and he respected both her acumen and reticence. But all the same, he promptly decided that this young Lawless must be a *mauvais sujet*.

In the pause which followed the closing of the subject of the son, Judy picked up the father's letter. She was not devoid of curiosity herself.

"Am I to read this?" she questioned.

St. John was thinking how prettily his companion's hair curled around her small ear, and how gracious were the curves with which her chin melted into her round throat. Caught in the act, with admiration in his eyes, he gladly took refuge in the letter, assuring the girl with *empressement* that he would joy to have her read it.

"It's a very nice letter," he affirmed. "An exceptionally nice letter, when one remembers that the kind old boy has never seen me."

Judy thought so likewise, and voiced the sentiment.

"Underneath the surface cordiality there is a shy tenderness which is captivating," she declared. "How very fond he seems to have been of your father. Do you resemble him at all?—your father, I mean. It will be a good point of departure if you do. You're very like Colonel Lawless himself. Any one might think *you* his son."

The slight emphasis on the pronoun put St. John's newly enlisted resolutions to flight.

"Isn't his son like him?" he queried.

"No."

She returned the letter to its envelope, and restored it to him, smiling curiously. St. John felt exasperated, and with reason.

"You'll get on with your uncle, perhaps," she nodded.

"Why, perhaps?" very sulkily. "Is he so uncommonly difficult?"

"Most uncommonly," laughing up at him. "He's a man of colossal prejudices. Many people can't get on with him at all."

"Who, for instance?"

"My father, for one. The relations between the two are strained to freezing courtesy and immeasurable distance. It's a pity; for the people over there," nodding in the direction of Marsh Mallow, "are our nearest neighbors, and Anita Mejares and her husband are charming."

The new inmate for Marsh Mallow felt that it was more than a pity—that it was unreasonable, almost childish. "What's the trouble between the old boys?" he disrespectfully demanded.

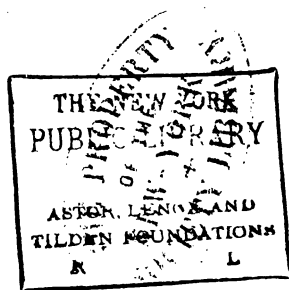
Judy sprang to her feet, laughing. "Burning questions," she mocked; "vital interests—matters that stir the souls of men! My father is of French extraction; your uncle, the British lion incarnate! My father was a United States officer; your uncle, a Confederate! What more would you?"

She moved towards the house, smiling back at him over her shoulder. And St. John followed, greatly amused, and also not a little

perplexed by the new elements which seemed spreading out around him.

"Cross-currents and eddies all about," he inwardly commented ; "tides uncertain, and a foul point or two to weather, maybe. That's all right, and a fellow can look out for 'em. I'll get in a bit of sailing in company with the little craft ahead while I'm down here though, or my name isn't Clere St. John."





IV

ST. JOHN had been domiciled at Marsh Mallow for a week, and, to use his own phrase, found himself "very satisfied." The patriarchal life amid flocks and herds and a limitless environment, which is after all the natural life of man, suited him. He cared for it all—the riding after the cattle, the administration of pastoral affairs, the dignity of a life apart, the space for individual development, the quaint domestic leisureliness and freedom.

The old house pleased him also; rested and refreshed his artistic taste, jaded and worn by crude aggressiveness and spick-and-span newness. It fitted in harmoniously with the architectural background of his memory, and made him realize as he had never done before that this virile continent is old and storied like the rest. More: that its history and civilization antedates by many cycles that day of grace whereon Columbus persuaded

Isabella of Spain to part with her jewels for the god-mothering of his venture.

Like the neighboring hacienda, Marsh Mallow was one-storied and rambling. Like it, also, it was roofed with glazed red tiles, fire-burned by some lost method. Its adobe walls, hard as friable stone, were many feet in thickness, and its casements were wide and latticed. The central courtyard, common to Spanish-Mexican houses, in this instance, was uncommonly spacious, and flagged with rock from the neighboring cañon. Its archway was also of stone, and boasted carving such as may be seen at the missions about San Antonio, and also a pair of folding gates of hand-wrought copper, said to have been brought from the interior of Mexico by a descendant of the *conquistadores*. They were green with age and damp, those gates, and no longer closed with accuracy, but, in themselves, were works of art as well as historic monuments. All the color-values of the place—its wealth of reds, yellows, browns, and greens, with a thousand intermediate shades—were toned to rich perfection, and subtly blended into soft true harmonies.

The picturesqueness of the edifice, as well as its aspect of antiquity, was enhanced by a dark mantling of vines—English ivy and Virginia creeper—which clung to the walls and angles, and even cast embracing arms across the tiles. To St. John, the presence of the ivy gave just the touch of home and old association which is requisite to make a habitation seem at one with its occupants. It was an actual disappointment to him to learn that it had not been brought direct from England.

“It’s Colonial English,” Mrs. Mejares explained. “The old homestead in Virginia was covered with it, and, when we came out here, the *padre* brought with him the ivy roots, and also those of the Virginia creeper. That last was a point of sentiment also ; my mother was a Virginian.”

“Did your mother come out with you?” St. John asked, gently.

He knew that his uncle had been many years alone.

Mrs. Mejares’ bright face clouded. “Poor *padre*! No, she died at home. ’Twas this way—very sad, you know, and difficult to bear. There was hard fighting in the valley

of Virginia, and my father was away at the front. Our home was in middle Virginia, and we were left alone there with the negroes. My mother managed the plantation and cared for my brother Tom and myself, both children. One day our house was surrounded by Federal riders. I can well remember it—the confusion of uniformed men and strange horses. Our own negroes went about with alien looks, and many of them fraternized with the enemy. The house was rifled from garret to cellar, many of the outer offices burned, and the growing crops devastated. It was terrible. Tom had a colt he was fond of, and when they led it out and saddled it, he interfered, claiming the animal, and disputing any man's right to touch it. He was only seven years old, and high-tempered; he felt himself robbed, and stormed and raged about it. The man who had taken the colt laughed at first; then, wearied of the boy's persistence, struck at him with the flat of his sabre. My mother was standing near, and, to save her child, sprang forward. I don't know how really it happened; whether the blow fell on her and knocked her down, or whether the

colt frightened and pushed against her—only that she got a heavy fall some way, and that it killed her. *Ay de mi!* It was a sad day!”

This story, so briefly outlined, gave St. John a glimpse into the arcana of an animosity which, to his outside view, had seemed unreasonable. With the flight of years should have come mitigation of offence, if not absolute placidity, St. John thought, unconsciously assuming that his own standpoint must necessarily be that of every other Englishman on the Western Continent. To St. John, Americans were Americans without geographical difference. This story gave him another point of view, and enabled him to realize how his uncle might hold himself justified in differentiating, and also in cherishing prejudices. He had suffered with one side, by and through the other.

Still, it did seem a pity that old issues should overlay and dominate new ones. Judith Fontaine could be guilty of neither political nor military misdemeanors, and it was really outrageous that social intercourse should be barred with her. St. John felt his instinct of fair-play revolt. Judy had, in their brief in-

tercourse, attracted him more than any woman he had ever met, in a like space of time; his instant and cordial acceptance at the neighboring hacienda had pleased his self-love also, and altogether he was minded to continue the acquaintance. But for these outside complications, how jolly it would be! His cousin, Mrs. Mejares, to whom he had taken an immense liking, because, in an indefinable way, and despite her pretty semi-Spanish affectations, she reminded him of his sister Maud, would, he felt convinced, lend herself readily to social projects. It was very provoking.

He had incidentally mentioned his unconventional stoppage at the Fontaine hacienda the very afternoon of his arrival at Marsh Mallow, but nobody seemed interested, so that he had refrained from details. Indeed, in these first few days the talk had been mostly personal, or else reminiscent.

Like most men who are well past middle life, Colonel Lawless was returning, in thought and interest, to the people and events which had filled his youth. England and, above all, Devonshire, with its associations, had ranged up close again, and become vital. In round-

ing his course to the finish, the old veteran's anchor, in a spiritual sense, seemed in truth to fall "where first his pennons flew." The companionship of a man of his own blood, a man reared amid the traditions, customs, and surroundings which had nurtured *him*, was a keen joy to Colonel Lawless, and the more that, in the sanctuary of his British soul, he was compelled to admit that his children were alien in thought as in birth. It was natural, even inevitable; but the knowledge that they were not Britons girded him at times.

"Aye, lad," he would say, cherishing his snowy whiskers, "it's a rare joy to chat with a man who knows old Dartmoor! Saw you ever such purple heather, or such golden whin as grows about Great Cawsand? Or a ridge more bold to its size than Yestor where it lifts itself up black against the western sky, and throws shadows athwart the waste of rocks at its foot? There's magnificence and gloom enough in some of those northern passes of Dartmoor to content any scenery-lover, without crossing seas for cañons and such in the Rockies. I mind well how your

father and I used to fish in the Taw when I'd come down for the long from Eton. A plucky little chap he was, six years my junior, and many's the royal day we've had hearken-ing to the lazy water crawling around the rocks that choke its bed, and waiting for the fish to rise. There were stones in the stream so balanced that the motion of the stream would make them cluck—cluck like an angry Langshang—and we boys used to pretend 'twas the nixies grumbling together and warn-ing the fish against us. Lord! I can hear the chicking of the stone-chat now, and the scream of the golden plover. Then how the wind used to rush through tor and crag, and bring to mind the gammers' tales of storm-elves and wailing banshee! Ah, man! there's no place like England, after all, to the folks born there. And of all fair England, to my mind the fairest bit is Devonshire."

And yet, when cornered, he would admit that this great Southwestern "divide" of the so-called New World was a good place enough—a prosperous, wealthy land, with room for all and a chance for every man to live out his life manfully, and show the stuff

that is in him. Sitting in the saddle on some prairie knoll and letting his eyes wander over the miles of rolling plain covered with gray-green mesquite and buffalo grass which owned him lord, and watching the cattle string out into grazing lines, or club together in bunches, the old soldier was fain to confess that he had come to good camping-ground, and that peace and plenty were his in abundance. Then, because he was human and therefore only intermittently grateful, he would bring his glance back to his nephew's face and forget it all in yearning for the green of Hatherleigh Meadows, and the purl of the trout stream meandering through them.

To that part of his life spent in Virginia and culminating in the tragedy of the Civil War, Colonel Lawless rarely alluded. There are years in a man's life—those big with love, happiness, disaster, or death, those holding the very pith and marrow of existence—which seem too sacred for ordinary mention. They are held apart in their own sanctuary and approached with bared head and unshod feet. Even with this man of his own race, who had played amid the graves in the

churchyard of his own native village and had been carried under the same lychgate for christening at the same font, the old soldier had reserves.

But that those years in Virginia held him with a grip of strength St. John speedily had demonstration.

Their ride, one forenoon, took them in a new direction, and Colonel Lawless, an enthusiastic geologist, called the attention of his guest to those strange cracks and fissures with which the prairie is serrated. Sometimes they seemed only a few feet deep, and could be readily jumped by a horse, while in other places they were clear, stiff gashes, yawning sheer and verdureless to a considerable depth. Through one of these cuts, wide enough at bottom to accommodate a pony trail, they took their way, keenly interested in examining its formation, which was new to St. John, and in observing the various strata laid bare in the abrupt walls. The Colonel rose to the occasion with every one of his pet theories, and enjoyed himself as only an amateur scientist can with an appreciative but unlearned audience.

After a bit, the gulch cornered into a cañon of depth and spaciousness whose *raison d'être* lay in the presence of a stream of water which gurgled and bubbled, amid rocks and luxuriant masses of vegetation, through its midst. Here the Colonel was swift to call attention to the difference in the appearance of a gorge whose cleavage force had been water, the gentler and more gradual descent of the walls, the marks of the various water levels, and the harmonious trend of the erosion.

"You should talk with my boy Tom about such things," he observed, as they paused to let the horses drink at a water-hole. "He's a better hand than I at getting the results of observation into language—has the American gift of speech, and of epigrammatic illustration. He's nimbler on his pins, moreover, and can scramble about to better purpose. He's a clever lad, is Tom. Your father's namesake, as you are mine. You two should know each other."

St. John cordially seconded the suggestion, inquiring, in addition, whether there was any possibility of his kinsman's return to

Marsh Mallow within a reasonable limit of time.

The Colonel's face gloomed over at once.

"Hardly a possibility," he admitted, reluctantly. "It's a pity, too, for I'd like well to bring you lads together. The truth is, Clere, this region is hateful to Tom just now. He came a nasty cropper hereaway, and it's shaken him, and put him wrong. He's better away for a while, poor lad."

"Through a woman?" St. John ventured.

The Colonel nodded, and reined into the trail again. He volunteered no details, nor did his nephew press the matter. A trouble engendered by love should be treated with delicacy and reserve.

Talking, therefore, of other things, they zigzagged up the slope of the cañon and came out on a ridge from which the prairie sloped away, without unseemly haste, in long, slow undulations. Here they paused to breathe the horses and look to their cinches, slackened by the climb. Away in the distance St. John beheld with pleasure the Fontaine hacienda, set like a jewel of color and brightness amid the dull gray of the plains.

He reverted at once to his visit, and with considerable animation. The Colonel listened impassively.

"What sort of man is Fontaine?" St. John questioned, at length. "He was away at a round-up, so I didn't meet him."

"As to person, you mean?"

"All around."

"He's a handsome fellow—tall, dignified, and all that. Was a volunteer during the war, and saw hard service. Distinguished himself on the field, I believe, and won his straps. His manners are good, and a trifle ornate—an inheritance, I take it, from his Gallic grandsires. He comes of a Huguenot family that originally settled in Delaware."

The Colonel quit himself of this information with an air of rendering painstaking justice.

"How 'd they get out here?" St. John wanted to know in addition.

"Easily enough. Fontaine père was an army man likewise—only regular, a graduate of West Point. He was stationed here during the Mexican troubles, and either fell in love with the country or was long-headed

enough to foresee the southwestern influx. He bought that ranch—twenty thousand acres—from a dissatisfied don who wanted to live and die under the flag of Mexico. He kept an agent here during his life, and none of his family have ever lived in Texas except this son, who settled here after the war, and a daughter, Mrs. Lestrangle. I don't even know whether there were more children. That hacienda is older than Marsh Mallow, I believe, although it don't look it, and the courtyard entrance is not nearly so fine. My place was built by a different set of hidalgos, and, tradition says, was started for a mission. You should get Luis Mejares to tell you the story. It's worth hearing."

But St. John was not to be diverted from his own point of interest.

"You probably see a good deal of the Fontaines, being such near neighbors," he observed, with diplomatic intention.

The Colonel laughed.

"There you're mistaken, my lad," quoth he. "The families see next to nothing of each other, and the less the better, to my notion. We've nothing in common in the

present, and armed hostility in the past. Henry Fontaine is a Yankee—dyed in the bone; and his daughter—” He paused, and his eyes flashed.

St. John felt suddenly and unaccountably nettled.

“Well, what of his daughter?” he interrogated, sharply.

“She’s the most infernal flirt in Texas—that is all,” growled the Colonel.

ST. JOHN'S anger cooled as suddenly as it had flamed up. Never having been flirted with, or even actively in love, he could regard the question abstractly and debate about it. Flirtation in woman, he argued, might be classified as a natural instinct—the sporting instinct—a trifle off color, because of the hypocrisy involved. In men, of course, flirtation was abominable, caddish at all times, and, under certain circumstances, villanous. Their sporting instincts had other and more legitimate outlets, from which women were debarred. To rail at an attractive, high-spirited woman for flirtation, to St. John, seemed as futile as to fall foul of a playful kitten for gamboling with a mouse. He thought none the worse of Judy for his uncle's blunt accusal, but he wondered how she could have managed to touch up the old gentleman so



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sharply, seeing that all neighborly intercourse had been disclaimed.

Later he found out the inwardness of the matter from his cousin's husband, Señor Luis Mejares.

The library and work-room of the novelist, a cheery, comfortable apartment, opened on the outer gallery with broad lattices, set with quaint little panes of stained glass. The floors were on a level, so that Mejares had no difficulty in whirling away from his desk and sending his wheeled chair through the portal and along the gallery whenever dominated by the restless impulse which lifts sound men to their feet and sets them tramping about with their hands behind them. During these peregrinations he was very approachable. St. John had fallen into the habit of joining him and lending a hand with the chair. The pair got on well together, the pluck and patience of the more gifted man, under physical infirmity, begetting in the less gifted man a sense of kinship and nearness, quickening his appreciation of brilliant intellectual endowments and a growing fame with warm throbs of personal liking.

"He's a capital fellow, Mejares," he observed to his uncle with friendly frankness a day or so after his arrival. "Jolly, and straightforward, and simple as a child. I thought swell authors were generally a bit cocky, but Mejares isn't."

"That depends on their quality," the Colonel responded astutely. "The same laws operate in literary as in social life; the Brummagem fellows, uplifted, swagger and brag, while the princes of the blood, being born to exaltation, take it quietly. When a little success converts a clever fellow into an arrogant ass, you may be sure there's asses' blood in his veins. The big geniuses are gentlemen in the fullest sense of the word. Legs are tremendously convenient, there's no denying that; but, by George, sir! there are things about a man that outweigh a sound body! And my Anne's husband is a millionaire in the real values."

In this dictum St. John acquiesced with perfect cordiality. He liked his cousin Anne sufficiently to make it a distinct pleasure to be able to like her husband as well. Following his uncle's example, he refrained from

softening Mrs. Mejares' Saxon patronymic into the pretty Spanish diminutive affected by her husband. He had a shy sort of feeling that in him it would seem overt familiarity. There were subtle reserves about St. John.

With Colonel Lawless the name in its simplicity was dearest. It had been that of his wife.

Coming in from his ride St. John found Mejares on the gallery, and joined him. "How are the legs?" he inquired, cordially, as they shook hands.

Mejares was subject to acute neuralgia in his afflicted members, and, for a couple of days, had been in purgatory.

"Jumping a bit still," the novelist replied, with a smile, "but steadying down. They'll work all right presently. They humped themselves and bucked like demons about day-break, which rather threw my day's work out. Since noon I've been 'playing ladies,' as the children say. Stop a bit and talk to me. Which way did you ride?"

St. John laid hold of the back of the chair, pushing it slowly.

"The new bull has arrived," he answered, "and is up in the old corral with a few outside head to get acquainted. We rode out to see him, and afterwards circled about the prairie a bit."

"What sort of a beast is he?"

"A very pretty beast; fine in the flank, deep in the brisket, back like a table, pasterns clean, and hoofs like onyx. He's Devon, every inch of him. Uncle Clere got quite sentimental over him. Odd, how the old boy clings to home after all these years of expatriation! One would think that the new interests would have weaned him."

Mejares laughed.

"What's bred in the bone comes out in the flesh," quoth he, amusedly. "The *padre* has never even been naturalized, although he's held property here ever since he came over, and borne arms for the Confederacy. He's a red-hot rebel, too, and touchy as a bear with a sore head about the late war. Haven't you noticed it?"

St. John nodded. Then, with the air of one confessing to a sentiment, he said: "I haven't been naturalized either. Been here twelve

years, too, and may stay the balance of my life. Somehow I can't get my consent to giving up the old country formally. It goes against me."

"That's what the *padre* says. You two are ridiculously alike—chips from the same oak block. Now my wife and Tom scarcely show the strain at all. They are both Americans."

"Anne reminds me of my sister," observed St. John. "There's a pose of the head and movement of the lips that's Maudie all over. Tell me about Tom. He should be a clever chap, from his father's account of him. We rode through one of those queer cuts in the plain—the one that elbows into a cañon. Uncle Clere was directing my attention to the various formation, and brought in Tom's name; rather crowing of his scientific attainments, you know."

Mejares looked thoughtful.

"Tom's clever enough," he assented. "Too clever, in fact, for the use he makes of it. 'Tisn't brains Tom lacks, it's ballast. He's a first-rate geologist and mining engineer—a first honor graduate of Freiburg, and ought to be well on the road to success and distinc-

tion. Instead of which he's fooling away his time in the Sierras with a lot of roughs, without regular position or employment, or even definite aim. *Madre de Dios!* It's enough to make a man forswear brains to ponder Tom! He might be anything, and is content to drivel. It's conservation of force that tells, and Tom"—he lifted his shoulders and spread abroad his hands with a gesture which rounded the sentence.

St. John's instinct of fair play caused him to put in a word for the absent man.

"His university record seems good," he suggested.

"Very good," assented Mejares. "That's what frets me. If he could make a start like that, he could hold it. It's disgraceful to peter out without adequate cause, and Tom's faculties are all there. Even abroad he was wild, though—wilder than the *padre* ever knew. He went the pace for a while, plunged at Monte Carlo and got into scrapes with other students. One side of his face was laid open in a university row. It disfigures him. There was nothing dishonorable in the scrapes, you know, only woful

lack of consideration and self-restraint. Tom's impulsive and hot-tempered; flies off the handle at a word, sometimes at a look. Lots of Virginians are so, and Tom takes after his mother's people. He's a likable fellow, too. His sister adores him."

"The Colonel intimated that he'd come a cropper over a woman," observed St. John. "That sort of thing lays a fellow on his back, you know—if it don't smash him up entirely."

"Yes, it does," the novelist admitted. "But Tom"—he paused, meditatively—"I'd like to know the woman's side of the affair."

"Who is the woman?"

"Our little neighbor yonder—Judith Fontaine."

"No!"

"Fact, I assure you."

"But I understand there was no intercourse between the families."

"There isn't. The Fontaines tried to be friendly at first, but the *padre's* aspect was that of one who turneth away his ear, and his countenance was bitter. When advances were made, his manner proclaimed 'Lo! an

enemy hath done this.' So the Fontaines, not unnaturally, became discouraged. Tom met the young lady first in San Antonio, at the graduating exercises of her school, and then followed her to Galveston, where she went to visit her aunt. He was fairly crazed about her. Poor Tom! Nobody knows the details of the affair, save those most concerned; not even Anita, although Tom has few reserves from his sister. We only know that, about a year ago, there must have been a flare-up, and that Tom has been acting *vaquero* for the devil ever since."



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ASTOR LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATION

2

1

VI

WHEN men are holiday-making, with leisure of mind and body, the happenings of the present satisfy them, and the influence of their immediate surroundings becomes paramount. St. John, interested by the stories told of Judith Fontaine, amused, attracted, and not a little curious, was not long in deciding that, having partaken of the Fontaine hospitality, it behooved him to make acknowledgment of the same. To permit prejudices in which he could have neither part nor lot to influence him to a breach of the social amenities would be ridiculous—an overstrain of deference—and neither as relative nor host could the Colonel require it. Already he had been derelict in allowing a week to elapse without calling, and he would brand himself boor should the courtesy be longer delayed.

The morning following his talk with Me-

jares, therefore, he got him to horse, and cantered away through the sunshine to pay his respects to the ladies of the neighboring hacienda.

The buoyancy of the atmosphere expanded his lungs and set his blood tingling so that he longed for hurdles to jump, or stiffish fences with a ditch on the off-side. He increased his pace to a gallop, and circled about, first to examine some queer cacti, and then to inspect a nasty tumble-weed, big as a cart-wheel, and lying loose in a buffalo wallow, awaiting a breeze to send it bounding on its evil way. He was glad of the chance to see it, for the Colonel had told him the day before that this pest of the prairies was getting rare, so relentless had been the settlers' war of extermination upon it. The blue of the sky and the gray-green sheen of the prairie dappled darkly where cloud shadows rested; the dim, slow-moving masses against the horizon, like waves in an offing, which he knew to be vast herds of cattle at graze; the silence of it all, the vehement vitality everywhere underlying its somnolent repression, excited his imagina-

tion like wine, and set him to speculating about his neighbors' affairs, and to dreaming vague dreams begotten of friendliness and inexperience.

This cousin of his—this love-fevered fellow who, in default of his *inamorata*, was wooing blind folly—it was really a pity about him. What if he—Clere St. John—should constitute himself minister extraordinary to the court of love, with self-invested powers for the disentanglement and regulation of this affair of the heart? It would be diversion of the most delicate, and a friendly thing besides, despite his uncle's prejudices. And in truth, what prejudice would have the ghost of a chance for survival if subjected to the light of Judy's eyes or the charm of her witching personality?

This thought switched him off, and he quit posing before himself as a sentimental benefactor, and let Tom Lawless drift away out of sight while he conjured up personal recollections of Judy.

The damsel, meanwhile, lay at ease in a hammock on the outer gallery, clad in a charming *négligé* of turquoise India silk,

plenteously garnished with ribbons and lace. One dainty blue-stockinged foot was in evidence, with the kid slipper off at the heel and dangling loosely, as the ankle was wagged to keep the hammock in motion. She had a fresh magazine up before her face, and was reading aloud a most wonderful tale of Japan. Mrs. Lestrangle, still a monument of woe as to garments, sat with her chair turned sideways, so as to face the reader, and sorted, on her sorrowful lap, embroidery silks of the most light-hearted and frivolous hues. A Maltese cat on the window-ledge made her toilet with assiduity, and a handsome collie pup a couple of months old sat upright on his haunches beside the hammock, and watched the swaying slipper with mischief in his eyes.

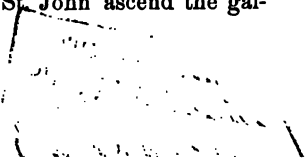
The ladies had discussed St. John, of course, for in country solitudes even the casual appearance of an interesting stranger becomes an item of moment, just as a trivial happening will elevate itself into an event. They had decided that he was very pleasant and gentlemanly, and that it was a pity they should see no more of him. Of course there

could be no calling at Marsh Mallow by the male representative of the Fontaines, for the manner in which Colonel Lawless had met former advances had proved an effectual quietus to neighborly amenities.

"And," quoth Mrs. Lestrangle, conclusively, "if the stranger within the gate isn't called upon and so bidden welcome, he's mighty apt to keep himself to himself during the term of his sojourn. So senseless of Colonel Lawless to take this ultra stand about the war, when he isn't even an American, and wouldn't be if he could. I'd just as well draw a line about the War of the Roses. If he were a Virginian born, or a Southerner of any sort, it wouldn't be so ridiculous. It wasn't *his* war."

Which was doubtless the proper standpoint from which to regard the matter, only, unfortunately, men cling to nonsensical prejudices much tighter than to things abedodied with wisdom. And an adopted quarrel is often nearer to the heart than one which comes in natural sequence.

It was therefore a surprise as well as a pleasure to behold St. John ascend the gal-



lery steps, with his hat and riding-crop in one hand, and the other extended with beaming cordiality. Mrs. Lestrangle permitted herself a soft Spanish expletive of amazement, *sotto voce*, and then rose to welcome him, jumbling, with one hand, her nicely sorted silks into confusion again. And Judy lifted herself upright in the hammock so suddenly that her slipper fell off, and was instantly pounced upon by the puppy, who sped off with it, utterly indifferent to the first principle of canine duty, which is to stand solid and bark at a stranger until ordered to desist.

The puppy fled along the gallery hilariously, with Judy and St. John both in pursuit. When they divided forces so as to head him off, he curled his legs under him and let himself roll off the gallery, alighted on a soft bit of grass right side up, and bounded away to a rose thicket, with intent to there ensconce himself with his prize and chew it to atoms. St. John leaped after him, and Judy sat herself down on the gallery steps, with one foot tucked under her, and laughed.

In a moment St. John, flushed but trium-

phant, returned, holding the slipper at different altitudes, and inciting the puppy—that circled around him in a succession of jumps—to have at it again.

“Nice little dog that,” he announced, cheerfully. “He showed his teeth and growled finely when I tweaked the slipper away; had to be boxed smartly to make him drop it, too. But he bears no malice—eh, doggalums? See him leap for it! He hasn’t hurt it, barring a little wetting of the kid. Here, let me put it on for you.”

He knelt on a lower step and tilted the shoe, and Judy, with a manner as unembarrassed as his own, poked out a dainty little foot from beneath her skirts and submitted to his ministration. The puppy looked on with his head cocked on one side, and a world of speculation in his eyes. And Mrs. Lestrangle bent over her silks with a smile of great subtlety.

The talk naturally started from St. John’s former visit; and the subject of animals being for the moment uppermost, the young man inquired the fate of the mule.

“I looked into the corral just before start-

ing," he said, "and saw the old fellow nod-
ding in the sun like a mandarin. He looked
pretty"—he paused, with a laugh.

"He *was*," assented Judy, "just as much
so as he looked. The whiskey flew to his
head and settled. After your departure, I
also visited my patient. He was down by
that time—stretched out prone, with his legs
and his neck made the most of. I thought
he was dead, and made lamentation; but he
wasn't. He opened one eye and glowered
at me groggily, then shut it up again. He
was sleeping off his debauch. Later he
staggered up and went for some water, look-
ing vague, and stepping with circumspection.
He'd a splitting headache, too. I know it
because the sockets over his eyes puffed in
and out, and moisture beaded his brow. He
eschewed food likewise, and consumed gallons
of water. Poor old Dick! 'Twas a sad ex-
perience for an exemplary mule! That wasn't
all, either."

"What else?" smiled St. John.

"Much; and of a like nature. Misfortunes
hunt in couples and packs, as that mule found
to his sorrow. He was the victim of igno-

rance and tenderness of heart. The men didn't get in until noon the next day, so for many hours Nat and I were herdsmen in charge. I'd distinguished myself, so next morning at daybreak Nat tried his hand. He had heard that a spree could be comfortably tapered off with soda-water, and feeling sorry for Dick's woe-begone condition, he undertook to compound some from the house-keeping supplies. He wouldn't wake up Carmelita to get him the soda box, but undertook to rummage the kitchen for himself, and the consequence was that that unhappy mule got cooled off with a big dose of baking powder."

St. John shouted with laughter.

"You should set up in practice, you two," he declared. "Such reckless self-confidence and boldness in experiment would insure you capital success. Is the beast still alive?"

"Yes; but much depraved in character. Our treatment affected his morals disastrously, and only yesterday he put a climax to a course of small rebellions by kicking over a new cutting-machine and injuring it mortally. This, you see, is a tale with a

moral. I'm thinking of sending it to Señor Mejares to get into shape for the blue-ribbon people. Will you give it to him?"

St. John laughed again.

"You'll have to hunt up another chronicler," quoth he. "Mejares likes a glass of wine himself upon occasion."

Then Mrs. Lestrangle asked a question which drifted the conversation away to St. John's own affairs, and he expatiated with pleasure upon the reception he had met with at Marsh Mallow.

"It's more like home than any place I've struck in the States," he explained, eagerly. "And my uncle's a dear old boy, full of prejudices and conservatism, but loyal and tender-hearted under it all, when you get at him right. It made a lump in my throat the first time he got talking about my father to me, and the days when they were little lads in Devonshire. I don't remember much about my father myself, for I was only four years old when he died. My brother and sister remember him better. My cousin Anne resembles my sister in many intangible ways, and I really like her immensely."

He seemed so unaffectedly pleased to put his kindred before them in a becoming light, and so completely ignored all strained relations, that the ladies both warmed to him, and put the requisite questions with a fair degree of cordiality. Their interest in the Marsh Mallow household, however, clustered most naturally about Luis Mejares. He was, in a measure, their own; an American, even as themselves, and doubly their own in being a public character. They spoke of his work with enthusiasm, and displayed that intimate knowledge of it which is the finest possible tribute. And St. John, out of his liking for the man, drew for them many charming pictures of the novelist's home life.

Then Judy, at her aunt's suggestion, brought out her guitar and sang for him a madrigal of Mejares' composition, in a voice which vibrated through him with its sweetness. As she sang, his expression changed subtly, softened, grew thoughtful, and touched to a finer quality. He twisted the puppy's soft, silken ears absently through his fingers, and when the girl finished gave simple thanks, unsupplemented by comment or praise.

Judy looked at him shyly through her lashes, and met his eyes and was satisfied. And Mrs. Lestrangle, her silks now in order, smiled quietly, and, during the rest of the call, assumed the burden of the conversation.



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ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

ACQUISITION

VII

DURING the weeks following, St. John fell into the way of spending a good deal of time at the Fontaine hacienda. His uncle was much occupied by a Mexican lawsuit, involving the title to some property owned by his son-in-law over the border, which Mejares was incapacitated from actively looking after himself by an unusually acute and prolonged attack of neuralgic rheumatism. His suffering was intense, confining him frequently to his bed, and his wife's time and thoughts were filled with care for him, to the exclusion of everything save imperative household duties. St. John was as helpful as circumstances would permit, but there were many unoccupied hours during which he must devise his own amusement, and this he found quite ready to his hand in the society of Judy Fontaine.

With the Marsh Mallow stud at his dis-

posal, the eight-miles ride dwindled to a mere breather for horse and man; and in addition to his regular visits he would often encounter Judy in her rides, and the pair would have long scampers together, to their mutual satisfaction and St. John's undoing.

Of her father, Captain Fontaine, the young man saw relatively little, for the ranch was a large one, and the *vaqueros* required a good deal of looking after. St. John's visits were paid at off hours, and he would never dine at the hacienda, alleging as a reason that in the evenings he could make himself useful at home, and give his cousin Anne a rest; besides which, at that time, his uncle would be at leisure and want to talk to him. In pleasing himself, St. John had always a just appreciation of the legitimate claims of others. He had met Captain Fontaine, of course, and considered him a wonderfully fine specimen of physical manhood, with an exceptional charm of manner. He did not share Judy's enthusiasm for her father in even a remote degree, but he was sufficiently impressed with the gentleman's attractions to wonder at his twenty years' connubial abstinence.

One day, when they were riding together, he rather astonished Judy by bluntly broaching the subject.

"It seems queer that your father never married a second time, Miss Fontaine," he observed. "He's a wonderfully attractive man, and his age doesn't hurt him; prosperous, too, and well accredited. Most widowers marry. Men are not monogamists, as a rule. Some theorists hold that they should be, and I've heard that the inhabitants of other earths in the universe are; but all that's clean aside from the custom with us. We terrestrial fellows aren't exalted enough. I should think that a man who'd once had the comfort of a wife would feel pretty lonesome when left to himself. Have you ever thought that your father might marry again?"

Judy settled her hat before replying. They had come to a bit of broken ground, and the horses were walking.

"Yes, I have," Judy admitted. "And long ago I used to be jealous whenever the idea was mooted—by the servants, you know, or my school-mates. Not jealous for mamma, because she died at my birth, and conse-

quently is but a heavenly ideal to me; but jealous for myself. When I got old enough I was sent to the convent school in San Antonio, because it's accounted the best. They take pupils who are outside of their communion, and papa could not bear to send me very far away. The good Sisters there put some sense into my silly noddle."

"On the subject of second marriages?"

"On the subject of that which consecrates all marriage—the subject of love," she responded, gravely. "They made me realize—the good Sisters—that much that goes by the name of affection is just selfishness in stolen garments. They said that love is sunshine, and that no one has a right to erect barriers to turn it aside from their fellows; that we should rather clear them away, and keep the atmosphere so that none of the life-giving rays are weakened in force or dissipated. It is a great responsibility to set one's self up and dictate. They said love could be best demonstrated by self-sacrifice. That set me thinking. I knew that papa had promised my mother not to marry again until I was grown and able to take care of myself. That

looked to me hard, when papa was still a young man when she died. When I was about fourteen I told him so, and that I was quite willing he should marry again if it would be for his happiness."

St. John felt touched. "What was his answer?" he queried, gently.

Judy laughed. "He pinched my cheeks till they burned, and then kissed me," she said. "Then he told me that he had not yet seen a woman he accounted worthy to fill mamma's place. So that was comfortable for us both, you see, and I hadn't the feeling that I might be spoiling his life. It is a hideous thing to spoil another life. And I really would not object to a step-mother who was a *very* nice woman, and loved papa well enough to put his happiness first."

St. John bent towards her a little.

"You may marry yourself," he said, and a glow leaped from his heart to his eyes.

Judy kept hers averted, scooping up her horse's mane with her crop, and throwing it from side to side.

"Things that are stranger have happened," she murmured, non-committally.

"That would not be strange," St. John asserted. "It is a natural—an inevitable—sequence. Women like you are made to bless men's lives; to fill their hearts and homes with light and love and a glory of happiness."

He paused abruptly and caught his breath hard. It had rushed over him in a strong wave that he loved her himself—that he wanted her; yearned for her with every force and fibre of his being. And behind this wave, a wake flotsam, came the conviction that for a man without income or prospects to feel as he did was little short of madness. He steadied himself, and forced back the words which thronged to his lips. He must first canvass this matter alone, and decide whether he had a right to speak.

The balance of the ride was unsatisfactory, long silences being disrupted with eager explosions of talk about irrelevant matters. Much earlier than her wont Judy insisted upon turning homeward, giving as a reason that her aunt's visit was hurrying to a close. Mrs. Lestrangle's migratory family were on the point of reassembling, and it behooved

the wife and mother to return to Galveston to welcome them.

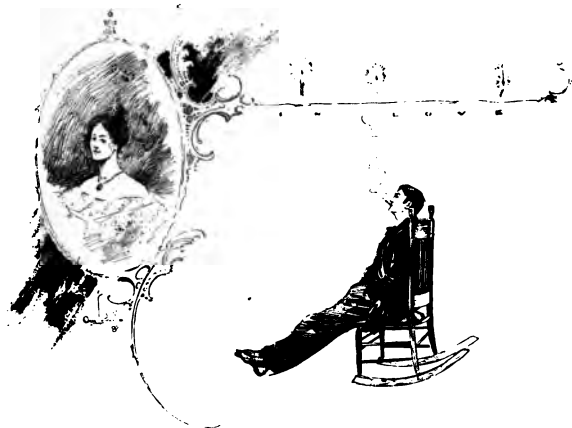
Whether or not the girl divined St. John's perturbation, and had no wish to precipitate a climax, is an open question. Certain it is that a new expression had come to his face; and that feminine insight in love matters might pass muster for revelation.

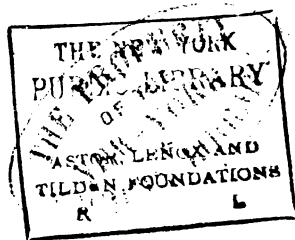
VIII

IN his own room that night St. John went over the situation. He accepted the great fact of his love unhesitatingly, unquestioningly, as he accepted other great facts of his being. There was even in his recognition of it that fine humility, that tender wistfulness and solemnity which a true-natured man will always feel when, for the first time, he basks in the glory which transforms the world. The impulse was in him to uncover his head, as one does in a place of worship, and his love seemed to him an element of marvellous purity and value.

Abstractly he knew about love, had played with the passion, and jested about it; but never until now had he realized its force, or recognized it for that which it is—an omnipresent and dominating factor of life.

After a little the fact of his love for Judy gave place to desire to tell her about it, and





to win from her some evidence of reciprocal passion. He went over their intercourse carefully, seeking a sign. Could she ever love him? Did she guess that he loved her? Then he thought of her eyes, of her lips; of the gracious curves of her form, and the soft dimpling of her throat where it rose from the shoulders. He dwelt on her tenderness, her honor and truth; and on the quaint humor which gave zest to her speech and made intercourse with her an unflagging delight. He compared her with the women of his own land, and exulted to think that not one of the titled matrons or maids whom he remembered was her peer in loveliness, brilliance, or breeding. If only she could love him well enough to become his wife, how he would joy to parade her before the prejudiced dames and ignorant damsels who presumed to look down upon this vigorous land, and to account its human products elemental and crude. His sweet Southern wife would outshine them all in her beauty and brightness. He half extended his arms, as though by so doing he could compass the space which lay between them; his eyes glowed with a hot

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light, and with his thought he caressed her. What would Maudie say if she could look upon his love?

The thought of his sister acted as a cold *douche* upon St. John's passion; he sat for a second paralyzed, almost gasping. A point of view suddenly presented itself which ill-pleased him. He had known all along that it existed, and, sooner or later, must be taken into account; but he hated it, and had willingly enough let passion thrust it one side. He sprang to his feet and paced the floor restlessly. He had fallen in love with a wealthy man's daughter, and Lady Wolcott would be delighted. He had fallen in love with a wealthy man's daughter, and had just twenty-five dollars in the world with which to make a home for her. He drew his breath hard, and then laughed—the disproportion touching his sense of humor. It was no laughing matter, however. Lord! what a fool he must be, to sit weaving visions with only twenty-five hard dollars to base them upon!

True, he could work—could establish himself somewhere, and toil for success as other men did. But where, and at what? He had

already demonstrated his incapacity for most enterprises going, and now, plus a reputation for failure, and minus capital, he did not seem to himself calculated for business pioneering in new directions. The life of a ranchman would, he knew, suit him admirably; he liked it in every detail, and had recognized his own fitness for it from the first. Given, for a start, a fair tract of country and a few cattle, and he felt confident he could engineer his fortunes to success: the round peg would have gravitated to a hole of the proper shape and proportions. This would be the sort of life and home he would choose for himself, and Judy was accustomed to it also, so that its conditions would be no strain upon her. If only it could be somehow managed. As he stood, however, he was as well accounted for purchasing and equipping a ship of the line as for buying and stocking a ranch of even the most modest proportions.

He paused in his walk as the idea of his uncle presented itself. Perhaps the Colonel might back him in a venture. He was of the old gentleman's blood—his nephew and namesake; the son of a much-beloved broth-

er. Then, too, since his arrival he had been given to understand in various unmistakable ways that his own personality had not been a disappointment to his kinsman. Surely all this must constitute some sort of claim.

Then he remembered that he really knew next to nothing of his uncle's resources; that the Colonel had a family of his own to provide for, and, in addition, that he was unreasonably—therefore violently—prejudiced against the very people with whom his nephew wished to ally him. Then, too, the young lady in the case was supposed to have flirted (with disastrous results) with the Colonel's own son.

St. John did not himself blame Judy in the least. He felt convinced that whatever may have occurred in the past must have been entirely Tom Lawless's fault. Masculine vanity is prone to misconstrue social *empressment* and natural amiability and the gregarious instinct in women; to mistake evidences of these harmless qualities for evidences of love. St. John was open to the same charge himself, but similitude in case did not strike him. Instead, he overjudged

his cousin, and being ignorant of love troubles, and forceful by nature himself, could not make necessary allowance for a weaker character and wilder impulses. Still, he could see plainly enough that, under existing circumstances, it would require assurance to request Colonel Lawless to smooth the path to marriage for Judy Fontaine.

Mejares might help him perhaps. All popular novelists are supposed by the ignorant populace to coin money hand over fist, and St. John knew that the work of Mejares was in demand. But then the novelist was a cripple, and, while his infirmities by no means interfered with his ability to acquire wealth, it seemed to St. John, striding about on strong legs, rather mean for an able-bodied man to borrow money of Mejares.

Then the devil tempted him with thoughts of how easy life could be made for him by others if only Judy should love him. But he kicked the devil out with some very strong language. A man should be self-supporting, at least, whether he could be wife-supporting or not.

He tramped about a good part of the night,

reviewing the situation in all its bearings, but coming to no conclusions. When the chickens were crowing for day he betook himself to bed and fell into uneasy slumber, diversified by dreams of an uncomfortable quality, chief among which was a vision of Captain Fontaine's conducting him—St. John—into an apartment of the hacienda, and there presenting him to a lady luxuriant enough to become a mother in Israel, and to five grinning urchins already in evidence. This was a possibility of the near future, his dream father-in-law assured him, adding, impressively, "there will be long division, my dear sir, *very* long division."



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R

L

IX

THE adage that "colors seen by candle-light are different seen by day" applies to most things in life. St. John awoke very cheerful, and with such energies as he possessed in full force. While he splashed through his bath, shaved himself, and got into his garments, he elaborated a scheme for his future which looked to him feasible. With the capital in hand he would hie him at once to San Antonio, and there consult agents—people who had that sort of business in charge—on the chances for getting a position as manager on some cattle or sheep ranch, with a definite salary on which a wife might be supported. He remembered having heard that reliable, intelligent men were sometimes in demand for positions of the sort, and also that men of education were preferred by gentleman owners. About this matter he could, and would, consult with both

his uncle and Mejares, keeping, of course, his interior motive concealed for the present. He felt that he might count on both men for advice, possibly for suggestion and influence. There were many Englishmen about, even a nobleman or two, and among them might haply be found a berth for a fellow Briton.

Even with an assured position, St. John knew that, financially speaking, he would be no match for Judy; but he had been in the States long enough to discover that ethnical values count at full worth with even the stoutest republican. America is still too quick with the blood of the old world for the old-world precedents and prejudices to have died out of consciousness. The young fellow, as was natural, thought well of himself for being English and a St. John, and, involuntarily, assumed that both facts must count in his favor. A man of birth and lineage stood in less need of gilding than would a mere parvenu. So light of heart did he become, now that he had evolved a definite scheme, that he fell to whistling Mejares' madrigal as he plied his hair-brushes, and visions of love and prosperity, conjured up by his imagi-

nation, flitted before him in alluring sequence.

To reveal his passion at once to the girl, he felt, might be premature, but he would see her that day and prepare her for a possible departure for a few days upon business. And, having already so openly devoted himself to her, it might be as well to leave in her mind a tender suggestion or two to work for him during his absence. Women were delicate creatures, and required considerate handling. He would not have his dear love hurt, even in *amour propre*, through negligence of his.

Colonel Lawless, he found, had been summoned, at daybreak, to a distant part of the ranch by an alarm of sickness among the cattle, and might not be home for hours. Mejares, however, was more at ease than he had been for weeks, had been promoted to his wheeled chair again, and was enjoying the morning freshness in a sunny corner of the gallery. This was told him by Mrs. Mejares, as the pair breakfasted together, and St. John noticed that she was pale, seemed troubled, and had little or no appetite. When

questioned, she admitted that she had slept little the night before, and that her head ached.

Then she diverted the talk from herself and drifted it, by gradations too fine for masculine perception, to the people at the neighboring hacienda. She led St. John on specially to discourse of Judy (which the young man was not loath to do), and seemed curiously interested in discovering his impressions of her nature and characteristics.

"Is she at all tender-hearted?" Mrs. Mejares questioned, a trifle wistfully. "Sympathetic, I mean, and capable of putting herself in another's place. That sort of nature is rare. Many women who would not deliberately set out to hurt anything, when they've done it inadvertently thrust the responsibility away from them, and are not even sorry. What you tell me of Miss Fontaine seems gentle and kindly, however; it attracts me."

St. John, with a lover's enthusiasm, promptly asserted that he had given her but rags of impressions, while the warp and woof of Miss Fontaine's nature was of the fibre of which angels are constructed. He waxed fairly elo-

quent, and gave Judy a character which no finite woman possesses, or could by any possibility sustain. And Mrs. Mejares listened with so much complacence and such evident appreciation, that her cousin had much ado not to take her into his confidence on the spot, and was only deterred from so doing by the coming and going of servants. Surely Anne must suspect something, he told himself joyously, and had taken this way of assuring him of her sympathy and interest. Decidedly, Anne was a woman of penetration and sweetness; no wonder she reminded him of Maudie, when she was so kindly and affectionate. He went out on the gallery to talk to Mejares in quite a glow of fraternal feeling for Anne.

St. John did Mrs. Mejares far more than justice; the truth of the business being that she had not the faintest suspicion of his love-affair. During the major portion of his visit she had been absorbed in family matters and nursing, and, with the exception of meal-times and during the evenings, had given little heed to her cousin's movements. When he was out of the house, if she noted the

fact, she supposed him to be away on the range with her father, or amusing himself with the horses. Her desire for information about Miss Fontaine had been prompted by purely personal motives. The previous evening she had committed an indiscretion which she was seeking to justify to herself. Her reason for interviewing St. John was because she chanced to remember that he had some acquaintance with the inmates of the neighboring hacienda.

Mejares laid aside his paper when St. John joined him, and replied to all personal inquiries with his customary courtesy. He was afraid to risk much motion yet, he explained, when St. John offered to wheel him about; his pain was in abeyance for the time, but it hung about, tiger-like, and might pounce on him again at any moment. He motioned his guest to a seat, and strove to entertain him, but with an absent atmosphere and in a perfunctory manner. St. John noticed it at once.

"See here, Luis," he remarked with comfortable directness; "that isn't necessary, you know. You mustn't fancy you've got to

lay yourself out for me when you're bothered. That sort of thing's a curse when a fellow's mind isn't free, and I can see plainly enough that you're in some sort of a hole. Can't I help you out? If so, I'll stay; if not, I'll take myself off until another time."

Mejares glanced up with a smile of appreciation. The other man's simple straightforwardness made matters easy. He took a sudden resolution.

"You've got a deal of that rare quality called common-sense, Clere," he responded. "And a bit of it might be of service. I *am* bothered, most particularly bothered, and I don't quite see my way out. Perhaps you can help me find it."

"All right," St. John said; "two heads beat one, you know. We can corral the animal together, I fancy. Let me see him."

"We can try, at all events," Mejares declared. "You're a man to be trusted and a member of the family, so there's no reason you should be excluded from counsel. Just wheel me into the study, Clere. We'll be less liable to interruption, and I want to talk confidentially to you."

St. John did as requested, grinning inwardly at this complete turning of the tables. He had come out with the intention of securing advice, and, possibly, assistance, from Mejares, and by a swift twirl of the wheel found himself anticipated. "All the better," thought he with great cheerfulness; "my turn will come later, and if I can give him a pretty stout boost he'll be all the more willing to give me one." Aloud he simply signified that he was quite at the novelist's disposal.

Mejares settled himself irritably. "It's about Tom," he announced, without circumlocution. "He's up a tree—the worst sort. A real top-lofty one, poor devil!"

"What's the matter?"

"*Quien sabe!* The usual thing, I suppose. Bucking the tiger, and all that. Écarté, monté, rouge-et-noir, faro, and the whole gamut of deviltry. Folly at the start and ruin at the finish! Tom comes out on bad lands. They all do finally. He's given a note for three thousand, and he can't meet it."

St. John whistled.

"When does it fall due?"

"In a week. Tom sent me a letter by pri-

vate hand last night. He's at a bit of a Mexican lay-out, a few *jacals*, a store and a bar-room, to the northwest here, sixty miles; a tag-rag sort of place, at the intersection of trails, and mostly inhabited by greasers and toughs. Not the sort of place for a self-respecting fellow to sojourn, but it's close by. Tom don't want to come home yet, and he asks me to send the money to him there by safe hand."

"Why didn't he ask his father?" questioned St. John, bluntly.

Mejares smiled.

"Because, with all his recklessness, Tom has a most unbounded admiration and respect for his father, and won't willingly appear to disadvantage before him. He's worked through pretty much all his scrapes without letting the *padre* know. This affair would cut the old fellow deep, and Tom knows it. The *padre* isn't a martinet, but he's rough on some follies, and gambling is one of 'em. He counts it not only dishonorable, but caddish—sinking a gentleman to the level of scalawags and rowdies. Tom and I are near of an age, and were chums at school before we became

brothers-in-law. It wasn't such a pull to come to me for help."

"But can you give it? Three thousand's a big sum to hand over at short notice. Have you got it by you?"

"Not exactly; but I can get it. I've securities on which it can be easily raised, if there was only time to go about the matter in the regular way. But Tom's crowned his folly by leaving his request until almost the last moment, and then putting himself in a hole with which there is no postal communication. God knows what he did it for, unless, as he hints, he expects me to drive up there and straighten things out. I'd do it too, but for these cursed legs having downed me so completely just now. The only way out I can see, in the time allowed, will be for Tom to take the securities, with a private letter of instructions, over to Fort Twilight, and get the adjutant there, who is a wealthy fellow and a personal friend of my own, to fix up the business until I can communicate with my banker. It can be managed that way, only I've got to communicate with Tom at once, and put him in the way of getting the money,

and I don't feel right about trusting valuable papers to any sort of a messenger. Then I'm not sure I can make certain points in regard to the matter impressive enough in writing. If Tom's been drinking, he mayn't half read my instructions, or understand them. He ought to be talked to and have things rubbed into him. Ordinarily I could stand the trip up yonder ; but now—" he paused irritably.

St. John saw his drift at once.

"You'd like me to go, perhaps," he suggested.

Mejares nodded emphatically.

"It would be the best way, if you wouldn't mind it too much. I lay awake a good part of the night studying it out. This last bout of neuralgia has worsted me terribly, and there is Anita also to be considered. We have been married a long time, and had almost given up hope ; but now—you've noticed?"

St. John's face softened. "Yes, I've noticed," he answered, gently.

"That being the case, you can see the importance of sparing her anxiety. If I make the attempt myself, I'll have to justify it by telling her about Tom, and then she'll have

two worries, and fret herself ill over them. Tom's escapades are enough on her mind as it is, without this climax. The *padre* ought to be spared, if possible, also. He's getting into years now."

"I've no sort of objection to going if you think I can manage, and are willing to trust me with the affair. But how about Tom?"

"Tom be hanged!" returned Mejares, angrily. "When a man plays the fool with his eyes open, and flounders into a bog, he's got no business dictating the method by which he's to be pulled out. *I'll* be thankful enough if you'll take charge of the affair. You're a stranger to Tom, and will appear simply as my agent. I'll coach you on the points I want pressed. It's asking a tremendous deal of you, Clere; but I really see no other way. The time's limited, and these legs of mine are virtually a Bastile."

"That's all right," St. John hastened to say. "I'm more than pleased to oblige you. Give me a straight lead in the business, and I'll work through to the best of my ability."

"I'm sure of it," acquiesced Mejares heart-

ily. "For the *padre's* sake, and Anita's. And see here, Clere: I don't ask you this additional favor, you know, but if you *could* get around Tom and make him cut deviltry and come home for a bit, it would be the best thing possible. An outsider can turn a man sometimes when a member of his own family would only make him kick by interfering. You've tact, and sympathy, and quite an uncommon lot of sense."

"Go on," grinned St. John; "butter me well while your hand's in. I'm a model preceptor of youth—a regular sugar-coated nostrum that children all cry for; that's *me*. But how about Tom? Some fellows are devilish touchy."

"Tom isn't. He's a lovable fellow in the main, or he wouldn't have such a pull on his people. Brainy, too, as you know, and could be no end of a credit if only he'd get into harness and trot straight. All Tom lacks is self-restraint and common-sense. I'd like to rake him fore and aft just at this present. But that's impossible unless somebody will tole him home for me. He might come if he knew about Anita.

He's tremendously fond of his sister, is Tom."

They discussed the matter in detail. Tom's messenger had gone to Dundalk on business of his own, but would return by Marsh Mal-low early the following morning, and could serve St. John as a guide. A curiosity to inspect a greaser settlement would satisfactorily account for St. John's absence for a few days, and so the matter could be kept quiet.

"You've lifted a weight from my mind by your kindness, Clere," Mejares said, gratefully, when everything had been arranged. "I'll not forget it either, you may rest assured. Just you come to me for a favor when you want one, that's all."


St. John, having his favor already in mind, grinned more than ever, and nodded. He would not speak out yet, however. Time enough for that when he should return with his mission satisfactorily fulfilled. The idea of occupying the position of mentor as well as messenger caused him inward amusement.

"By George," he thought, "I've had a col-lie at my own heels trying to hunt me into

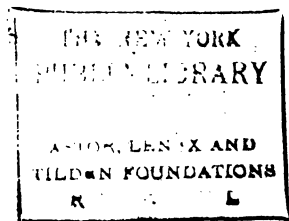
decent pastures so long that it's droll to be invited to play collie for somebody else. Wouldn't Maudie laugh if she could see me working *her* racket. I'll do my best to bring this youngster in by the ear, if only for Anne's sake. Dear, sweet soul! how sympathetic she was this morning, and how interested about Miss Fontaine! No, Anne sha'n't be bothered about that precious brother of hers on this deal if I can help it. And now I must get to horse, and have a word with my lady before absenting myself. Will she be sorry, I wonder, and miss me? I hope so. God bless her!"

X

ON returning from her unsatisfactory ride, Judy dismissed her cavalier somewhat distantly. The hacienda was in considerable commotion, for letters had come up from below which necessitated Mrs. Lestrangle's immediate departure. Her brother, who had business in Rosalita, the nearest railway town, would accompany her that far on her journey, and remain away from home several days. During his absence, a Mrs. Mitchel, the wife of one of the ranchmen, a most respectable woman, and sufficiently educated to be companionable, would, with her baby, come to the hacienda and bear Judy company. She had filled this office on sundry other occasions, so the young lady made no objection, but at once set to work aiding her aunt with her preparations. The start on the following day must be a soon one, for Rosalita was a hundred miles distant, and Mrs. Lestrangle







always preferred making the entire trip in her brother's buck-board. It did away with the necessity of making connection with the stage at Dundalk.

After sunset Nat came into the courtyard and crossed to Judy's window with a note in his hand. It had been given him by one of the Marsh Mallow *vaqueros*, he explained, with a charge to deliver it into the *señorita's* own hand. Judy turned the envelope, examining it by the waning light, but the handwriting was unfamiliar, so she slipped it into her pocket unopened. Her aunt needed her, and she was in a hurry. The letter must wait. Naturally, she supposed it must be from St. John, and wondered at his writing so soon after leaving her. He had never written before. But who else at Marsh Mallow would dream of writing to her?

The satiny envelope lay within touch of her hand all through the evening, which was necessarily a short one, because of the early start to be made the following day. When she returned to her room Judy took it out and laid it among the dainty toilet arrangements on her bureau, while she brushed out

and plaited her masses of hair, and made herself comfortable in dressing-gown and slippers. She was really curious to know what St. John could have to say to her, but took a childish delight in tantalizing herself. When she could think of nothing else to do, she seated herself in an easy-chair and broke the seal, with a smile on her lips.

Although dated from Marsh Mallow that very evening, the note was not from St. John. Judy read it hurriedly, glanced at the signature—"A. Mejares"—and then reread it slowly, her eyes widening and her breath coming quickly.

It was a pitiful note—of the sort which impulsive, tender-hearted women will write, on an unconsidered impulse, in a moment of stress. It did not anger Judy as a communication on the same theme, couched in different terms, might have done. There was no reproach in it, and no vexing insinuations. A few facts were implied, and an appeal made. That was all.

The writer was nearing her time of trouble, she said, and the closeness of motherhood had caused her to recall and understand

an expression she had seen long ago on her own mother's face when she—Anita—a child of six, had been first taken in to see the brother which God had given her—the expression of celestial fruition, won, she now knew, by the suffering and sacrifice of love. Memory of that mother-look, and love for her own unborn babe, had interplayed within her and vanquished all pride and foolishness. She *could not* go down to the valley of death without trying to comfort and save her own mother's child from the folly and recklessness into which he had plunged to stifle the pain of his heart-hurt. Miss Fontaine must know how fine were his traits, how noble and generous his impulses. She could not help knowing. And then he was so clever, so lovable, so eagerly enthusiastic. Those who could rise to the noblest altitudes could also plumb the depths; it was the heritage of a vital, impassioned nature. And with men of this sort love was all-powerful—love lifted them, love debased them. The fruition of love made of them men greater than their fellows; the futility of love was as a whip of scorpions urging them to destruction.

Poor Tom, love-hounded, was wrecking his life in the effort to forget love. Would the woman to whom he had given his all do nothing to save him?—a word would suffice, almost a look, to stem the current of his course and turn it to good. It was a great power this—a great responsibility, which God had given into the hands of women. With love and hope in his future, Tom's present would steady, and withdraw itself from evil contact which begot reckless conduct. Tom knew nothing of her writing, Anita said. He was near, it was true, at a small place called Vallejo, sixty miles to the northwest; but he would not have written himself, nor have permitted his sister to write, had he known. It was on her own responsibility that this appeal was made—because the motherhood within her yearned in sympathy with that sweet remembered motherhood of which Tom was the offspring.

That was all, and the fact that the poor woman had believed every syllable that she set down, and had written out of a full heart, gave it force. Judy, although much less blinded to Tom's weaknesses than was his

sister, felt a lump rise in her throat, and her eyes smart with tears. She laid down the letter and sat, like a culprit arraigned, her thoughts skurrying back into the past, seeking her sin to confront herself with. An oppression of responsibility seemed settling down upon her, and her emotions were so stirred that, for the moment, she could not determine how much was hers of right, and how much might lawfully be thrust aside. Nor could she see clearly that misery is no excuse for wilful self-degradation. A man should regard manhood's worth and its inherent responsibilities. The very fact of Tom's having sought to dispel disappointment by folly, or worse, proved him deficient in the qualities potent to win and hold the love of a woman like Judy. But by some natural paradox the girl's very superiority prevented her from realizing this, and, instead of judging Tom, she humbled herself, feeling constrained by issues and ideals the like of which had, apparently, small weight with her lover. She dropped her face on her hands, and wept bitterly and guiltily, because Tom was said to be going wrong for

love of her; and knew so little of love herself as to be ignorant that it is passion, not love, which, under disappointment, generates evil impulses. True love makes a sanctuary of the heart, not a hell.

Being ignorant as yet of all this, Judy sat in sackcloth, so to speak, and belabored her breast with vain woe. And underneath all, *perdu*, in sub-consciousness, vanity lay, tickled softly under the fifth rib, and winking complacently to the sort of self-love which is gratified by implied possession of power.

The girl's sin, after all, had been nothing heinous—rather folly and thoughtlessness long persisted in, than deeper delinquency. A tougher conscience and less refined taste would have held it as nothing, or a pastime of pleasure. At the school festival in San Antonio, where she had been a gay *débutante*, and Tom Lawless the first good-looking young fellow who had ever looked love in her eyes, she had flirted with him joyously—give and take—with neither party in earnest. That had been fair enough, but later it had not been fair, for, ere he followed her to Galveston, the man had come into a heritage

of deep earnestness, and the fullest passion of which he was capable. During those Galveston weeks the best that could be said for Judy was that she had not meant to wrong Tom. She liked him better than any man she had yet seen, and let him know it; she enjoyed his attentions, and let him see it; she even accepted his love in a tacit sort of way, believing herself always just on the point of returning it.

And so she might have done, drifting into an engagement as women will, despite innate recognition of uncongeniality, but for Tom's own conduct. How could she help shying off when she found out from actual experience the spasmodic quality of her lover's character. Her instincts were for well-regulated methods, and law and order; and Tom existed in paroxysms. Could she help disgust when she saw him not always able to control his appetites?—or a species of moral revulsion when she found his views on many points unstable, and capable of the most bewildering gymnastics? The truth was, Tom's character was too complex for Judy's comprehension; therefore, instead of growing

towards him, as she fully intended, she had grown away.

She had not intended giving up her friend : she liked Tom, and always had, and always would like him ; but when she had been fiercely arraigned for trifling with a man's heart for her amusement, and, when weary of the pastime, casting it aside, what could she do but fly into a rage and hurl back the charge with equal fire ?

Still, with his sister's pitiful note in her hands, Judy's conscience ached sorely, and she repented her that she had flirted with a grievous repentance.

She got little sleep that night, and that which visited her was troubled by dreams, and did her no good. In helping the travellers off the following morning, she heartened up a bit, but that excitement was soon over, and, when the tail of the buck-board had disappeared in the distance, misery laid its claw on her again, and grimly accompanied her whithersoever she went. Mrs. Mitchel and her baby were not to arrive until late in the afternoon, so she had not even that poor distraction.

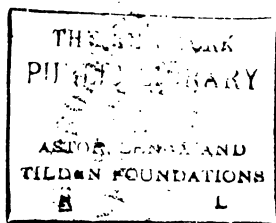
If only she could devise some way to help Tom without personal interference! That, of course, was quite out of the question, as even his sister would acknowledge, could she but know the arcana of things. What a sweet woman she seemed, this Anita Mejares—so tender and womanly. If Tom could be enticed home again and subjected to home influences, surrounded by the love of his own people, which must hold to him through all, and bear with him, and which might exhibit itself without limit—why, surely that would be best. The constant affection of this lovely sister, the interest and companionship of his father and brother-in-law, would surely fill life with value and profit once more. She remembered well Tom's talk of his people; his unbounded respect and admiration for that noble-looking, attractive old soldier, towards whom she herself often felt drawn despite his provoking and unreasonable prejudices; his warm love for his sister, and his almost venerating affection for the genius and character of his distinguished brother-in-law. She had always thought Tom at his best when he discoursed

of his home life and people, and so had encouraged him often to do so, until her own knowledge of and interest in the Marsh Mallow household had become intimate and thorough.

If only her whilom lover could be brought back to his own! She did not actively think of the prodigal son, but she unconsciously wished that a similar experience might develop in Tom; that he might become disgusted with the swine husks and mire, and arise and return unto his father's house.







XI

It was in this mood that St. John found her when he came over, quick with his own love and hope, and intent on making initial amatory advances. They had barely touched hands, however, when his lover's instinct informed him that her atmosphere was unpropitious. It dashed him; but he bore up, and hoped for better luck presently—instead of which he got worse.

Judy entertained him in spiritless fashion, telling him of her aunt's departure and her father's plans; of a new colt that had appeared in the watches of the night; and of the duenna she herself expected to share her solitude. Then she listened politely to St. John's own bit of news, but seemed in no way affected by it. Which was not to be wondered at, since her lack-lustre atmosphere had taken all the snap out of St. John, so that instead of announcing his departure for

a brief season in the tenderly suggestive manner he had contemplated, he brought it out casually, in a bluff, off-hand way, as though it were a matter of small moment, and no special interest.

It was all very *triste* and disconcerting; but then, as has been shown, Judy was in the phase of emotional depression in which one's estimate of one's self strikes bottom. Then, too, her mind was full of Tom Lawless, so that, for the nonce, Clere St. John was out of touch with her.

The next moment he had put himself into the very citadel of things, so to speak, with one sentence.

"This place to which I'm bound—Vallejo—doesn't amount to much, they say; but Mejares has business there, and is tied by the legs, as you know. My going is purely to accommodate him."

Judy pricked up her ears, and faced about briskly. This was the name Anita had mentioned—the place where Tom was.

"Where is Vallejo?" she questioned.

Come, thought St. John, this is better; and he gave the desired information with per-

spicuity. It was a beastly little hole, from accounts—a greaser settlement; but as he had never seen one, nor even a Mexican *jacal*, it might prove interesting for a few hours. Should he bring her any trophy of the place—bead-work, or fossils, or unpolished gems? Greasers often had very good bits of moss-agate, onyx, or jasper, in the rough, picked up in their peregrinations. If she had a fancy for that sort of thing it would give him pleasure to bear it in mind.

Judy let him talk on without interruption. Her mind was a perfect maelstrom of impulses and desires, in which discrimination eddied and whirled, and prudence got sucked under and carried out of sight. Here was a chance for poor Tom. St. John was his cousin—a man of his blood—and the guest of his father. He would be *obliged* to take interest in Tom and desire to help him. Blood was said to be thicker than water—to constitute a tie of worth even between those personally unknown to each other; it had been proven so in St. John's own case, when Tom's people had sought him out—a stranger—and invited him to their home and affec-

tion. St. John himself owned the force of blood ties; she had heard him often admit it; surely he would not repudiate this one, when the kinsman was in such sore need of countenance and aid! St. John was a good man, tender and true and strong-natured; he had thoughtfulness for others, and intelligent consideration. He was going to this very place where Tom was—this Vallejo—and would doubtless see his cousin, or could, without trouble, provided he could be made to comprehend the necessity for it. Almost it seemed like a providence that St. John should visit Vallejo.

That the business of the novelist might in some way be connected with his brother-in-law never entered her mind; nor that St. John might misconstrue her own motive should she interfere. Conventionalities have slack hold on isolated people, and, as far as Judy knew, St. John was ignorant of her former intimacy with his cousin. She had never talked of Tom to him, nor did she realize that others might have done so. Her dominant thought in the matter was that, through St. John's aid, she might undo some

of the harm she had done, and so quiet her conscience.

She spoke out on impulse and without considering her words; and in less than five minutes St. John was in possession of the fact of her knowledge that his cousin, Tom Lawless, was in this very village to which he was bound; that she was aware also of the wild life he was leading, and that she earnestly desired that influence might be brought to bear which would withdraw him from reckless associations and give him a fresh start.

St. John squared himself, and his face paled. It was a bad blow to him that she should care so much; totally unexpected, too, since he had unconsciously held her apart from other men in his thought since realizing his own love for her. In his mental confusion at this abrupt transition of the point of view he overlooked many details, and jumped to the conclusion that she had loved Tom all along, and now wished the estrangement between them to be brought to an end. But to ask *him*, of all people, to aid her, seemed to him terrible. She could not know! She must never have guessed his own feeling

for her! He groaned in spirit, but his body was silent.

Judy, engrossed with her own thought, and utterly heedless of her companion's changing expression, proceeded to press her point.

"He ought to be helped to his feet again," she urged, vehemently. "Some man of his blood should seek him out, be gentle with him, and persuade him to give up and come home. It is terrible that he should be going wrong and no hand extended to check him! He is capable of so much that is good; so much that is fine and noble. His friends are all anxious—so miserably anxious!"

St. John bent forward with a strange look in his eyes—a compelling look, as of one who would have truth at all costs.

"Are *you* anxious?" he demanded.

Something in his tone brought the blood to Judy's face with a rush; but she stood to her guns.

"Yes, I am," she replied, stoutly, "very anxious. Tom Lawless is an old friend, and it hurts me that he should be wasting his life. I think some one should interfere. You are

of his blood, young like himself, the guest of his father—I think *you* should interfere.”

It was on the point of St. John’s tongue to question why she should delegate the task to another—why she did not undertake it herself? Surely no other could have so much influence, or such a chance for success. Manhood restrained him, however, and, instead, he said abruptly, almost savagely :

“Why should *I* be set to play mentor? Why not his father, or Luis? They are nearer, and more fitted for the task.”

“That’s just it,” pleaded Judy, eagerly. “They are too near. Interviews would be too untrammelled. They could, and would, employ language that *you*—that any outsider—would be chary of using. They would have the matter too much at heart for diplomacy, and, instead of leading Mr. Lawless, tactfully, to see what a blunder he’s making, they’d confront him with it vehemently and put him in a rage. Their feeling, and his own shame, would react in obstinacy. No, no: don’t you see that one outside—one who cares a little, but not overwhelmingly—will be best? Then, too, you are going to this place where

he is. It will be all in your hands, so to speak. Oh, you can help him, I know, if only you will."

In her earnestness two great tears welled to her eyes and made of them soft, starry lakes of entreaty. The sight stung St. John to the quick. He misunderstood her entirely—and small blame to him for it. He gave her emotion a meaning apart from the true one, and silently ground his teeth. Her reasoning was so good also—for Lawless; and her pleading had been convincing. Oh, the pain of it!—the brutal, bitter pain of it!

He could not sit there like a block, however, and allow a woman to weep. He was obliged to be good to her; to be gentle with her. It must have cost her something to appeal to him. Even in his misery, he told himself that. He must be considerate and gentle, because she was a woman, and because he loved her.

He got himself to his feet, how he scarcely knew, and steadied his voice to calmness.

"Don't cry any more," he said, simply. "I'll do what I can for you. I will, on my honor."

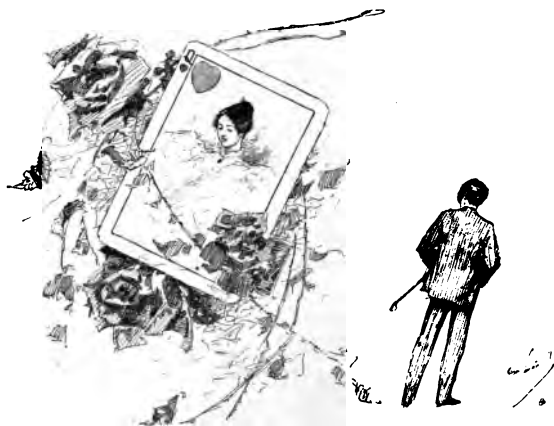
He did not notice the pronoun made use of, nor did Judy. A horrible intuition of her mistake was forcing itself on her consciousness. The reflex of his emotion had touched, and was stirring her; memories and suggestions thrust themselves forward, jumbled chaotically, but none the less significant. Her eyes widened, regarding him piteously; her lips parted, and her breath came in sobs.

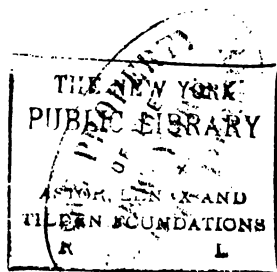
"You don't understand me," she panted. "You—you"—then the impossibility of any explanation swept over her, like a great tidal wave, and stranded her on a reef of dismay and regret.

She covered her face—burning now with confusion—with her hands and turned away from him, but not before, for one vital instant, she had seen the poor fellow's heart in his eyes. And St. John, misunderstanding her more completely than ever, accepted his mute dismissal, and withdrew himself.

Judy, left to herself, dropped down in a heap on the sofa, quivering with mortification, and wept with all her might. When the fountain of her tears was exhausted, she lifted herself, all dishevelled, and walked

across the room to a mirror and looked deep into her own eyes, and addressed remarks to herself which, had they been levelled at another person, must have caused that person abasement.





XII

ST. JOHN took himself and his shattered hopes off in such order as he could manage, every sob of Judy's finding its echo in his heart. So that was the end of it all—of his beautiful dream of a home and a wife in this alien land; a dream which had promised to change into poetry of the noblest and best the dull, sordid struggle for existence amid unpropitious conditions. It was all gone to smash—broken like a prismatic globe formed by a child's breath and set afloat in the sunlight. Through and through, from start to finish, it had been a failure, this American experience of his; mere fluctuations of high hope and flat and utter downfall. He had just as well give it up and go back to England, and let Maudie, or even his own brother Tom, map out the balance of his life for him, and marry him to a cotton-spinner's daughter if they would. It would be all one to him, for this

last cropper had about used him up, wind and limb. He would almost as soon be led off the field and shot as anything else, in his present mood.

His heart ached with a pain that surprised him, so much more acute was it than mere physical torture. He felt nerveless and battered, like a man who had just pulled through an illness. His love did not love him—never would love him, he told himself, over and over, with desperate iteration. She could not love him : she loved another man.

And what sort of man ? A fellow without stamina enough to keep himself straight until a temporary misunderstanding should right itself. A fellow who flung himself devilward, like a spoiled, inconsequent child, because the thing wanted did not drop into his grasp at once. A fellow whose conduct brought tears to her eyes, and forced her to the humiliation of seeking outside aid in her extremity. Bah ! it was wellnigh inconceivable that this thing should be !

In his jealous bitterness, St. John forgot the general impression that the break between Judy and his cousin had been regard-

ed as final, and might have been so accepted by the young man himself. What could Tom know—that hypothesis being granted—of Judy's present attitude, or that which St. John assumed to be her present attitude? This point of view failed to present itself; and if it had, in St. John's present mood, he would doubtless have growled that Lawless should have divined how matters stood by intuition; or, in any event, have kept straight for the sake of his own manhood—a position which could not be well controverted.

And yet St. John himself was exhibiting an obtuseness equivalent to that with which he credited his cousin. His own intuition was equally at fault, and to the full as blinded by personal emotion. Had he been capable of reasonable analysis, his own sensibility must have shown him how impossible it would be for a woman who truly loves a man to invite an outsider to inspect with her that man at a disadvantage. She could not do it, even with the laudable intention of invoking aid to help him slough off his follies. If she knew her ideal to be tarnished, and love burned in her heart, she would endeavor to

hide the pitiful knowledge even from her own sight. It is when friendship, not love, rules a woman in her connection with a man that she can be reasonable about him. And had St. John been less perturbed himself, he must have realized that Judy had been most reasonable about his cousin.

But, lover-like, he saw nothing save his own aching heart, and Judy, all shaken and pleading. And the more he thought about Tom the less patience he had, and the more inclined he felt to let that brother sinner "gang to t' deil his ain gait." It is even to be feared that he grimly decided that such a fate would be good enough for him.

He tramped the floor of his chamber half of the night, fuming and fretting that he would have nothing more to do with the business, even while he knew positively that he must go through with it, since he could not in honor leave Mejares in the lurch. It eased him to make futile protests, even when acutely conscious of their futility. His gorge could overflow into them as it rose.

"I *must* keep faith with Luis," he groaned. "He has my word on it—devil take it. I've


got to take this money safe to that fool, or be mansworn. Much good may it do him! But this elder-brother business I'll be hanged if I'll undertake. Let him pull himself up. He'll get help enough without me."

Then the vision of Judy returned, and words he himself had spoken came back to him. Had not he promised to help her?—and that, too, on his honor. He writhed, but underneath it all he knew that that promise of his would hold him with a grip of steel.

Towards daybreak he threw himself on his bed and dropped into heavy slumber, dreamless and deep—the sleep of exhaustion. And at the time appointed he got him to horse, and rode forth to the assistance of his rival in a nobler and more manly spirit.

XIII

A COUPLE of days passed eventlessly, and during them Judy recovered her tone and much of her customary light-heartedness. During the hours which immediately followed St. John's departure she had put herself on the rack of humiliation, and turned every conceivable thumb-screw and pulley by which *amour propre* might be tortured. She had applied unflattering epithets to her conduct, and decided, without appeal, that in blundering officiousness and besotted idiocy she was entitled to full graduate honors. She had poured out perfect libations of tears over the whole miserable situation, and over St. John's probable estimate of her. And then had suddenly bethought her of her own good intentions, and also of the look in St. John's eyes at the last. These reflections so cheered her that she took heart of grace to believe that, when St. John should calmly review





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the affair, enlightenment would come to him. Surely, if a man felt that way himself, he must understand that, if a woman felt that way, she could not possibly do that which she—Judy—had done. This was incoherent, but, apparently, satisfactory. When St. John should return, matters would adjust themselves comfortably once more.

The prime factor in this return of cheerfulness was not, however, hard common-sense, but Mrs. Mitchel's baby, an engaging young person of eighteen months old, who was having a respite from the horrors of dentition, and, with true feminine philosophy, devoting the interim to enjoyment and the acquisition of accomplishments. She was a pretty little creature, and manifested a most flattering preference for Judy over every other woman at the hacienda, and as a natural consequence Judy became, for the nonce, her playmate and nurse. Merry romps the pair had on the gallery, and Judy taught the child to ride on the puppy's fat back, to that animal's annoyance, and to caper unsteadily to music.

"See, *niño* !" she would say, seating herself

on the gallery floor with her guitar in her lap and a plate of sweeties on a chair close at hand. "See, I will play thee a *cachucha*, and thou shalt dance for me pretty. Here are *dulces* for thee, *amorita*, but first thou must earn them. See!"—and she would point to the plate, laughing.

Then she would gayly thrum the *cachucha*, and the little one, grasping her little short skirts with her chubby hands, would stand solidly on one foot and prance the other up and down, varying the performance by turning herself about with circumspection, and rocking from side to side gleefully. After which there would be kisses and sweeties, and also a great deal of applause for the performer from both orchestra and audience, the last represented by the mother sitting near.

It was very sweet and human, and it did Judy a world of good.

On the afternoon of the second day, when the child was asleep and the mother busied about her own affairs, Judy repaired to her room, with an unfinished novel, and curled herself comfortably on a lounge beside an open window. The spring was still young,

but the air was exquisitely soft and richly perfumed with the breath of violets, which old Carmelita, who loved them, kept growing in all the kitchen windows. The sounds of the courtyard came to Judy distinctly, but they were not inharmonious, so she remained where she was. Carmelita had brought out an armful of tins to the bench under the pecan-tree in the centre of the court, and sat in the sunshine brightening them. When one attained a brilliance that pleased her, she would turn it about in her hand with a smile, causing the reflection to dance sportively about the opposite wall.

Near her lounged a *vaquero*, the lover of one of the girls that helped with the housework. He was on his way home from some expedition, and had stopped in to see his sweetheart and tell her of the good hut which his boss had promised to build for them when the calving season should be over. It would be a snug home when Maria should come to keep house for him. While he waited for his sweetheart to come out to him, the *vaquero* told old Carmelita about it; and Judy, laying down her book, listened likewise.

She could see the man's figure, picturesque and athletic, and thought how well the color effects in his costume—the red of his shirt, the blue of the silk handkerchief hitched carelessly about his bronzed throat, the russet of his long boots, and the gleam of silver in bell-buttons and sombrero ornamentation—came out in the sunlight against the brown background of the tree-stem and the lighter, more delicate tinting of the adobe walls beyond. She had the eye of an artist and some skill, so she raised up on her elbow and reached for a sketch-book, pleased with the picture the two figures made.

Never had lover an audience more unsympathetic than the *vaquero* was finding old Carmel. She held his species cheap, and as creatures devoid of truth and responsibility. She had been wed to a *vaquero* once, a man of great laxity, unless report did him injustice, and, although the saints had delivered her from his companionship for full fifteen years, the memory of him abode, and distorted the atmosphere through which she regarded his fellows. She looked now at the handsome, but rather weak, face

of the specimen beside her with open disfavor.

"Maria is a fool," she observed, sharply, and went on with her work.

"In what way, Carmelita?"

The young man's tone was nettled, and Judy smiled over her work. Old Carmel was so droll with her prejudices.

"For giving up something for nothing," the old woman said. "This good home, the light work, the good pay, the ease of body, and the gifts. Saw you the mantilla the *señora* brought Maria from the city—lace, I tell you, real lace. When can *you* match it? Then the gowns at the feast times—silk sometimes, or wool of the best, and the kerchiefs, the ribbons, and stockings. The *señorita* gives with both hands, and Maria has ever been a favorite. What can *you* set against this? A wash-tub, I warrant, and a cook-stove; coarse rations for *dulces*; blows, when the liquor has gone to your head, hard work, and always a fagged, aching body. Holy Jesu! that girl is a fool!"

The young fellow laughed lazily—so sure of himself and of his own desirability.

"And the *love*, Carmel," he smiled; "do not forget to count that."

The old cynic put aside her work the better to scoff at him.

"The *love*!" she derided. "*Madre de Dios!* just hearken. The passion it is—here to-day, gone to-morrow, like the flight of a bird. Tell me, *compadre*, how many *loves* have you had! No lies, now. I know you—*vaqueros!*—*diablos!*"

The lover glanced about, disconcerted. "*O, jo, madre!*" he stammered. "It is a tale you would make!"

Carmelita grinned abominably, and pushed her advantage.

"Where were you night before last, *demonio?*" she demanded.

"Abroad with the cattle."

"And last night?"

The *vaquero's* face brightened. He saw a way to rid himself of inopportune questions by creating a diversion. This was important, for who knew what tales the old crone would presently be retailing to Maria. He threw a world of interest into his face, and tuned his voice to the key of one possessed of excitement.

"Last night was a bad one," he said, gravely. "Have you not heard? Three men were knifed."

The old woman abandoned her investigations at once, and bent forward, her black eyes a-glitter with interest. Even Judy's hand paused, with the pencil-point on the end of Carmelita's nose, and her face was turned to the window.

"We hear nothing," the old woman said. "Where was this?"

"At Vallejo. You know the place. I went there on business. The greasers and toughs who live there have had a growing quarrel with neighboring cowboys. Last night it headed. A lot of cowboys raided the town after dark, and gutted the saloon. They were crazy with drink, and insulted a woman. Then the men of the place fell to, hammer and tongs. Pistol shots cracked, and knives flashed, until 'twas all a hell of confusion and fighting. Every man whipped out his blade and struck what was nearest. *Jesu Maria!* but it was fine! The women fought likewise! One girl had a revolver at a window and fired—blam—blam—at everything! A

man sprang inside—tore it out of her grasp; then she went for him with her hands and her teeth! *Maldito!* what a fury!"

"*Santa Maria!*" muttered old Carmel, crossing herself devoutly. "What next?"

"Why then—all in a moment—it was over, like that!" snapping his fingers. "The cowboys had been beaten from town, and were mounting their horses. They yelled like Comanches! They struck in the spurs and vowed to return; then they galloped away over the prairie, even as they had come—*el demonios!*"

"But the men knifed? Who were they?" Carmelita urged.

The listener inside rose, with a white face, and bent forward.

"*Quien sabe?* I'm new to these parts," drawled the *vaquero*, who caught a glimpse of his sweetheart through an open window. "They said one was the son of Señor Lawless, beyond here at Marsh Mallow, and another a stranger, a yellow-haired fellow who fought beside Lawless. I saw the pair once, in a doorway; but that was before the fight got so furious. The third man was the bar-

tender. I helped carry him in a house myself. The knife was in his heart to the hilt."

Again the old woman crossed herself. "*Gracias a Dios!*" she muttered — "what times!"

Judy leaned out of the window and motioned imperiously with her hand. She knew the *vaquero* by sight, and now called him by name. As he advanced at her bidding, he could see that she was pallid to the lips, and that her eyes burned.

"Is it *true*, that you said?" she demanded, hoarsely, bending out to him. "Those men that were knifed — are you *sure* they were the men you mentioned? Think hard! In the confusion — the fighting — might you not make a mistake?"

The *vaquero* shook his head, unwilling to remit aught of the horror of his story. He had seen the dead bar-tender himself, and had helped to handle him. A greaser whose head he had bandaged told him about the others. He said the men fought side by side, and against heavy odds. There was little doubt of their fate. No, he had not been to Marsh Mallow. He was new to these

parts, and knew none of the people about. The Vallejo folks would send over a messenger, of course—perhaps had sent.

"Get me a horse," ordered Judy, peremptorily. "The best in the corral. Carmel will give you my saddle. Lose no time, and I'll pay you. I must find out the truth."

She spoke in hard gasps, and wasted no words. The *vaquero* departed to do her bidding without protest. During his short absence she made the necessary change in her dress swiftly, and gave directions to Carmelita. Mrs. Mitchel must be explained to, and if her father should get home during her absence he must follow her to Marsh Mallow.

Then she sprang through the window, crossed the courtyard, and signed to the *vaquero* to swing her up to the saddle. And in a moment she had settled herself, gathered up her reins, and was riding away southwest at a hard gallop.

Old Carmelita looked after her an instant and then flashed round on the *vaquero*.

"'Twas a lie!" she declared. "You wished to make a grand tale and you made it. *Madre*

de Dios! You saw not the men dead, but were told by a greaser; *he* saw not the men dead, but fighting. You are a fool! And I should be another to believe you!"

She spat contemptuously and went back to her scouring.

The man followed her.

"If 'twas a lie to you," he growled, "why didn't you stop the *señorita*?"

She glanced up again.

"Can one catch and hold a norther in the belly of one's *serape*?" was the pertinent counter query.

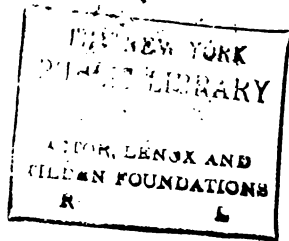
"No: nor halt a woman in love! That is the truth, Carmelita. And 'tis *love* which rides double with the *señorita* this day and lays on the whip. Take my word for it."

The old woman said nothing.

XIV

JUDY instinctively followed the trail through the cañon. It was the nearest way, and every moment was of value. The descent into the cañon forced her to slacken her speed, and, again, the narrowness of the trail through the branch gorge compelled circumspection. But beyond was the open prairie, with only sage and *chaparro* to impede progress, and there she gave her horse rein and sped forward. The long, level rays of the westering sun slanted across the plain and glorified it, showing the brightness of cactus and verbena blossoms diversifying the gray-green of the mesquite grass. The gigantic shadow of rider and horse slanted behind them, and seemed to leap after, weird and distorted in goblin mimicry. The sharp yelp of a wandering coyote, impatient for darkness, cut the silence in twain, and was echoed hideously by the howl of a lover, standing motionless,





sentinel-wise, on the sky-line. A jack-rabbit, scared up from his nap beside a sage-bush, pricked his great ears to attention, and made off across the trail in a swinging lope; in the dog villages the young puppies scudded to earth, while the old dogs scrambled to the top of the mound and barked like mechanical toys. A couple of vultures, sailing slowly above in the infinite blue, suddenly half furled their wings and settled to earth far ahead.

Judy noticed it all—every sight, every movement and sound. Air and earth seemed alive to her as never before, and every sense was strained to abnormal keenness in the effort she was making to hold thought at bay.

She would not let herself think—she dared not. The horrible story she had listened to, quick with yet more horrible possibilities, lay like a cloud of oppression close to consciousness, ready, at the slightest relaxation of vigilance, to roll forward and overwhelm her. She held it off fiercely, saying over senseless rhymes to herself, counting aloud, taking note of her way, of her horse, of her animate and inanimate surroundings; resolute not to let herself think; resolute to husband her

strength and her courage for that which might be before. Should the wounded men still live, no messenger might have arrived from Vallejo, and she herself might be the first bearer of the grim intelligence. Action must be instantly taken to set doubt at rest; the father must get him to horse; the sister must be prepared so that worse harm might not follow the telling. And for the man who had none near—a spasm swept across her pale face, and she bent in the saddle, urging onward the horse. No: thought was bad; thought was agony, collapse, incapacity for endurance, for action. She must ride.

Mile followed mile, and the good horse spurned the plain with his hoofs with regular, rhythmical beat. His grand space-devouring stride filled his rider with joy, with wild exultation. Only a little longer—moments now—and she would breast the slight rise on which the hacienda stood, and learn whether or not the worst could be verity.

The light had gone from the sky, and even the pink after-glow was cooling, through mauve, into slate-color, by the time that Judy drew rein at the Marsh Mallow gateway. The

hacienda seemed so peaceful and quiet that she instinctively avoided the front approach, nor would she ride directly into the courtyard. Her appearance could not fail to astonish, perhaps alarm, the inmates; for why should she—Judith Fontaine—come to Marsh Mallow save as the bearer of tidings? Even in her own stress and excitement she was thoughtful for Mrs. Mejares. In the corral she found a cowboy attending to the stock, and questioned him as to whether news had come from Vallejo that day, and, receiving a reply in the negative, sent him in to summon Colonel Lawless, bidding him observe caution should the *señora* be in the room.

The fellow, aglow with curiosity, did her errand with speed, and when he returned, with the Colonel at his heels, quietly stationed himself within ear-shot.

A soldier is trained to surprises and to the suppression of all emotion which may impede instant comprehension and prompt action. By the time Colonel Lawless had made out who the messenger was, he decided that her news must be urgent—and evil; so that when he got to her side, and took her hand in his,

the old discipline was in force, and he wasted no time in social amenities.

"You bring news of importance," he said, gravely. "What is it?"

This prompt apprehension of the situation braced the girl's quivering nerves like an electric shock. She returned the pressure of his hand with a strong clasp, bent down to him and told her story, not as she herself had heard it, but in terse sentences and without circumlocution.

The old soldier did not flinch.

"When did it happen?"

"Last night. I don't know the hour, but it was along after dark."

"Both knifed, you say—my son and my nephew?"

"The man said so. He thought it likely that word had been sent you already; but I could not rest satisfied. It was nobody's business, in special, at Vallejo, and the risk of your not having heard was too great. I've lost little time since I heard. There was no one else who could come as quickly."

"That was right," the veteran said, with approval. "That was sensible and brave."

Now I must act, for every moment is precious. Mr. Cartwright!"

The cowboy advanced with quite surprising alacrity.

"You have heard the news this lady brings? That's well and saves time. You must come with me to Vallejo at once. Saddle the grays, Cartwright, and put corn in the pouches; we'll have to rest once to keep the nags going. Say nothing to any one. My daughter must hear nothing until she can hear all. If there should be a messenger on the way, ten to one we'll meet, and can turn him. Look sharp, Cartwright! Every second is precious."

Then he turned again to Judy, laying his hand on the neck of her horse.

"Young lady," he said, "the expression of my gratitude, and of my admiration for your courage and promptness, must wait until later. Let me take you into the house before I go. I can trust your discretion. And all requisite explanation of your appearance among us I leave to your woman's wit. Come! It's too late for return, even under escort, for that which I can offer you is not suitable."

But Judy shrank away from him. In a tidal wave of horror it swept over her that hours and hours must pass before she herself could hope for the relief of full knowledge, that while the rest were shielded from anxiety by ignorance, *she* would be a prey to all the torture of suspense. Worse: that while she invented plausible explanations, and parried curiosity with small talk, the light might go out of eyes that had looked love into hers; that hands she had never clasped with affection might stiffen without that clasp forever; that lips that had never touched hers might grow cold without kisses. It was not as though she were *certain* that death's work was done—then she might have schooled herself to patience; but now!—now!—when uncertainty's self meant the glimmer of hope! No; love had spoken within her heart with a full voice, and would not be denied. She could not remain behind—more, *she* would not.

She laid her ungloved hand on the Colonel's and bent downward, in the waning light, until she could look into his eyes.

"Take me with you," she pleaded. "I can-

not stay behind, not knowing. This suspense tortures me. Take me with you !”

The Colonel expostulated.

“My dear young lady, the thing is impossible! I must ride through the night—almost without drawing rein. The fatigue would be terrible for a woman! Then this Vallejo is no fit place to take you. Give it up!”

“I cannot,” she responded, steadfastly. “What matter about fatigue? I am strong. My horse is a good one. I shall not delay you, or be an encumbrance. What matters the place—any place, in stress like this?”

Her persistence annoyed the Colonel, and he spoke sharply.

“It is out of the question!—the wildest scheme I ever heard of! Come, I shall take you inside to my daughter at once. Time is precious, and here are the horses.”

Driven to bay, Judy abandoned every vestige of reserve, and let the agony in her heart ring out in her voice.

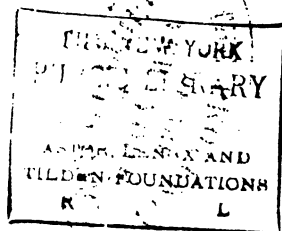
“Can’t you understand?” she wailed, bitterly. “Must I put it in words? Have you no heart, no memory, that you can’t see how it is? I tell you I *will* go! Nothing shall

stop me. My heart is breaking under this suspense!"

Strangely stirred, the old soldier withdrew his opposition at once, and spoke to her soothingly, tenderly, telling her that it should be as she wished.

And as he swung himself into the saddle and rode away at her side in the gathering dusk, he caught himself wondering if his son could be the man that she loved. And, in spite of his long-cherished prejudices, he hoped that such might indeed be the case.





XV

THROUGH the long night they galloped, the cowboy in the lead, because of greater familiarity with the trail, and the other two abreast, riding silently. Once they halted for a brief space at a water-hole, to loosen the cinches and give the brave animals a drink and a mouthful of corn. Then up and on again, through moonlight and darkness and the keen gray of dawn.

The sun was well up when they sighted Vallejo, and the horses were nearly spent. Judy's beautiful bay drooped his head, and moved with effort, his nostrils flaring in and out with his hurried breathing: the spume-flakes had dried on his bit, and the sweat crusted along his withers and flanks. He had come farther than the others. Half a mile from the village Judy slacked the reins on his neck.

"He's done up," she said, desperately.

"Don't wait for me. I'll come on as I can."

The cowboy pulled up likewise. "Go on, Colonel," he urged. "This means more to you. I'll take care of her, and we'll come in as the horse can. Find out about things and meet us at Flinn's saloon. It's the best house in the place. I'll bring Miss Fontaine there."

So the Colonel went forward alone.

When he entered Vallejo the place seemed deserted. It was a miserable collection of adobe huts for the most part, supplemented by *jacals* of miscellaneous construction. The liquor saloon, as Cartwright had stated, was the most pretentious building in the place—a box house of four rooms, roofed with canvas. Here the Colonel dismounted and sought information from a deaf and rheumatic old crone who appeared the sole denizen of the place, and who could speak nothing but Spanish. The impossibility of making her comprehend him nearly put the Colonel beside himself; but partly by pantomime, and partly through his own imperfect knowledge of Spanish, he gathered that a funeral was in progress in a grove of cottonwoods beyond

the village, and that the population *en masse* were attending it. Whose funeral it was he could not make out, only that the corpse had been a good Catholic, and that the *padre* from the Mission Dolores had been secured to perform the obsequies. This satisfied him that the dead man could be neither his son nor his nephew ; so, leaving his tired horse in the saloon yard, he proceeded on foot in quest of fuller information.

Judy and her escort followed as rapidly as the condition of the horses would permit. At the saloon they found the Colonel's horse, but no living human creature—even the old crone having hobbled away on some quest. The cowboy slipped off the saddles with celerity.

"Stop here, *señorita*," he said, and led the way into a room behind the one used as a gambling-place. "This is a wild place, but you'll be safe here. I know Jack Flinn well enough. Don't you fret! I'll rouse up the news, and be back in a brace o' shakes."

Utterly broken-down and dispirited, the girl submitted to being left, and sank down on a long box in the middle of the room,

over which a *serape* had been spread. It had been recently used as the resting-place of a coffin, but she did not know that. Her head sank on her breast, and her hands wrung themselves together; she sat waiting for that which might come to her in a very apathy of despair. Presently the mood lightened, and she straightened herself and glanced about. The room was evidently used for a chamber, for rude bunks were fitted against the walls, and above them, on pegs, hung men's clothing. The door by which she had entered was covered by a crimson Navajo blanket, disposed like a curtain, and now half pulled aside. Above the portal a bullock's frontlet, with branching horns, was fastened. On the other end of the box on which she was sitting lay a crucifix, and, near it, a pair of huge rowelled Mexican spurs.

A slight movement attracted Judy's attention to the doorway, in which a child presently appeared—a little creature of six, or thereabout—clad in a single garment. The little thing stared at her solemnly, evidently much impressed with this new specimen of the *genus* woman, and not quite sure of its

harmlessness. The thought came to the girl that even this baby might possess the knowledge for which her soul panted, and she set about making overtures of friendship. Fumbling in her pocket for some means of attraction, she drew out a bright-colored bit of cornelian, which St. John had picked up for her during one of their rides. Her lips quivered pitifully, but she held the stone out to the child.

"Come, little one," she coaxed gently, speaking in Spanish. "Here is a beautiful stone for thee. Come and get it."

The child's black eyes glittered; she advanced a few steps and half-extended her hand; then a sudden spasm of shyness seemed to overwhelm her, and she drew back.

The soft voice coaxed on.

"Come, baby. Fear nothing. See how pretty it is!—bright, like the *serape* in the doorway. Come in here and get it. I will not hurt you."

The small creature advanced again, smiles dimpling her dark, rosy cheeks, making them resemble the sun-kissed side of a blood peach.

Then a step in the outer room seemed to bring back all her fears in an avalanche. She glanced hurriedly about, like a frightened animal, and fled swiftly away.

A sob rose in Judy's throat, and she began to tremble hysterically. Would this suspense never end? Had she come all this distance still to be held back from the truth? Had the men forgotten her; or was the verity so awful that they feared to disclose it?

Then the footstep crossed the outer room, the Navajo blanket was thrust still farther aside, and St. John stood before her.



cry, and then sank back again, then
“You—*you!*” she gasped—“not dead
dead!” Her face whitened to the lip
her eyes were almost wild.

St. John, realizing something of the
she must have been on, and frightened
out of his wits about her, sprang forward
caught both her hands.

“Don’t faint, for God’s sake!” he entreated
his tone fairly trembling with trepidation
“There isn’t any need, on my honor. I
right. Tom isn’t hurt any to signify
got a nasty slash in the shoulder, but I
ended it at once, and the *padre* they
for is something of a doctor. Most
are, you know, and when he got here
got bandaged up properly. We had
the news would get around so quick
would have sent a messenger over our
There’s no need to— Good Lord!
off!”


But Judy had not fainted. The relief
was so great that it unnerved her completely.
She began to cry first, then to laugh
finally went off into the first fit of hysterics
she had ever indulged in.

St. John was at his wits' end. He had never seen a woman in hysterics before, and could not rise to the occasion. He thought, at first, that she was going into convulsions, and began frantically to entreat her not to. Then, through his confusion dashed a recollection of having once read in a novel that, under circumstances resembling these, the patient's corset laces were cut and she was given sal-volatile. The drawback to trying the effect of this treatment in the present case was that the nearest drug-shop was a hundred miles distant, and that he did not in the least know where corset laces were situated. He did the best he could, however, patting Judy vigorously on the back and beseeching her "for God's sake to give over, and pull together a bit." Then all her soft hair came down in a flood, covering his hand and forearm and twining itself about his fingers in soft, silken meshes. A faint perfume rose from it, like the odor of an old-fashioned spring rose, and penetrated his senses and set every pulse thrilling so that he stood trembling and dazed, with his hand lost in her hair.

In a moment he pulled himself together again and freed his fingers gently and moved away a pace. Then an inspiration came to him, and he dashed to the bar-room and there procured a fiery fluid mendaciously labelled French brandy, a spoonful of which he compelled the girl to swallow. It scalded her throat and set her to coughing, but it produced a diversion, and finally enabled her to regain self-command.

When she had quieted down, St. John leaned against the wall near her and heroically began to talk about Tom again.

His cousin had gone out to Fort Twilight, he explained; had started that morning, in fact, for his wound was going on well, and he had business of urgency at the post. The bridle-arm was sound, and the ride not a long one, so there was no cause for apprehension. Besides, the post-surgeon could look at the shoulder. Tom had not even gone by himself. A couple of fellows made the trip with him—acquaintances with whom he had business. It was a thousand pities she should have heard of the fight and endured so much needless anxiety. St. John



spoke with effort, as one who compels himself to a difficult task. His eyes were on Judy, who still trembled, but who was trying to recoil her hair. She gathered the rich masses together with both of her hands, drawing out the loosened hair-pins; then she essayed to recoil it, but was still too much shaken. Her hands fumbled helplessly, and she let them fall again to her lap, while the silky brown flood tumbled about her once more, softly framing her face, and matching in color and lustre her beautiful eyes.

There is something about the hair of a woman which possesses a strange, almost marvellous fascination for the opposite sex. Not hair in order, curled, braided, or coiled to the tip of the mode; but hair free and floating; hair full of the abandon and witchery of nature. Well may the Lorelei comb out her tresses of gold and toss them afloat to the breeze, as she sings wild elf-songs! For, truly, she knows 'tis the sheen of her hair more than the witchery of her sweet siren voice which lures men to her bidding!

Judy, enshrouded with the wealth of her tresses, dishevelled, and pale, was in St. John's

eyes a thing more to be desired than all the treasures and glory of earth. He stirred the hand which but now had been baptized in its beauty, and throbbed again with the emotion which contact with the silken meshes had caused him. His love surged with fierce power, beating against the barrier of his self-restraint; a groan forced itself from his lips.

Judy caught the sound instantly.

"Are you in pain?" she demanded. "That cut on your forehead. Is it serious? Has it been properly attended to?"

St. John reassured her impatiently. It was nothing—a surface gash of no moment. The priest had fomented and plastered it. Neither his wound nor Tom's at all justified the anxiety they had caused. She would soon see for herself, as Tom would return to Vallejo by nightfall.

Then Judy surprised him.

"Never mind about Mr. Lawless," she observed, quietly. "I want you to get some one to attend to my horse for me. He must be fed and rubbed down. I must arrange to return home at once."

St. John stared at her.

"But Tom!" he stammered. "I thought — I supposed" — he paused in bewilderment.

"You thought all wrong," Judy retorted with impatience. "And you hadn't any business to think at all. No man has: they are too stupid. I must go home."

She lifted her hands again to her hair.

A light leaped to St. John's eyes. Could she?—was it possible? *Could* she have been anxious about *him*?—frightened for him? His mouth settled into firm lines; his expression became resolute — masterful. He moved forward and bent towards her.

"Look at me," he said, peremptorily. "Let your hair alone! Look me straight in the face. I must get to the bottom of this thing. It's life or death to me. Were you frightened for Lawless—or *me*?"

Judy kept her eyes down. Crimson waves from her heart surged to her throat, to her brow, and lost themselves in the dark of her hair. St. John came nearer still, drew her to her feet with one hand, and with the other lifted her face to his.

"Was it for him—or me?" he repeated.

The veiled lashes lifted themselves shyly, but other answer there was none.

Nor was there need. St. John opened his arms with a murmur of love, and drew her into them, close to his heart, and lifted her face again for his passionate kisses.

"My brave love!" he murmured. "My courageous, beautiful darling! To think of your caring so much! To think of your riding through distance and night to see whether a worthless fellow like me had been chopped into mincemeat, or not! There isn't another woman alive would have had the pluck to do it. It was superb! God! how I love you!"

He strained her to him again, and crowded kisses on her eyes, on her throat, and on the red of her mouth.

"Lord, what a donkey I was!" he broke out again, "to think that you—that *any* woman—would have sent me gallivanting after Tom; to fish him out of the mud and brush him off—if she cared twopence about him."

Then Judy found breath and space to affirm obstinately—

"I do care. I always have cared, and al-

ways shall. Mr. Lawless is my friend, and I was as anxious to know that he hadn't been killed as ever I could be."

St. John laughed. Then a jealous flame kindled in his eyes.

"But you would not have come to find out about *him* yourself, would you?"


"I'd have carried the word to Marsh Mal-low," asserted Judy, loftily.

"But here? You wouldn't have come *here* for any fellow but *me*, would you, dear? Answer me! It was *love* brought you blundering across that blessed prairie in the dark, wasn't it? And that love is mine. Tell me so, sweetheart. I've endured such misery over this thing. Tell me that it is *me* that you love. You haven't once said it. Give me my name, darling; say — 'Clere, I love you.'"

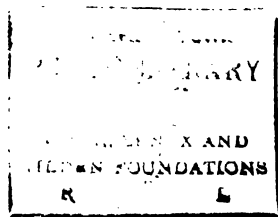
His tone was so pleading that Judy refrained from more teasing, and, lifting her arms to his throat, said softly and tenderly, "Clere, I love you. And it was for the sake of that love I came."

XVII

DURING most of this time Colonel Lawless and Cartwright, having seen to the comfort of the horses, were refreshing themselves with *tortillas*, *chili-con-carne*, *frijoles*, fried in bacon fat, and *tamales*, washed down with strong coffee. The Colonel, it is true, on entering the house, had gone at once to the inner apartment to confer with Miss Fontaine and discover her wishes, for he was already aware from the cowboy that her anxiety must be at rest. So engrossed were the pair that they failed to notice his approach, and the Colonel himself never entered. As he neared the doorway, the position of affairs made itself manifest; so with a muttered "By Jove!" he reached out his hand and noiselessly drew the Navajo blanket into place, after which he retired. Nor would he suffer them to be disturbed, although he carefully reserved a portion of the food for them, and feed a Mexi-







can woman to make fresh coffee and keep it hot on her stove, and also to produce a plate of *dulces*.

So that had been the reason of the girl's wild alarm. It had been St. John's reported death or wounding which had had such power to move her; St. John's last hours she had fled hither to comfort. And all the time a hope had been growing within him that the heart of this brave lassie was inclined to his son. It was a great disappointment, and the old soldier sighed.


He had taken an enthusiastic liking to Judy, whose courage and patience under the long strain and fatigue had won his respect and admiration. There was fine stuff in the girl, he had told himself, more than once, as he galloped beside her through the long night. She was a real soldier's daughter, so sensible, so resolute, and, withal, so docile and grateful for care. He almost thought well of his old enemy for having reared such a child; and coveted her for his own son. Not that he begrudged his nephew the prize, now that he knew how matters were. He wondered a little when Clere had

done his courting, and then remembered that the fellow had, unavoidably, been left a good bit to himself during his visit. Where maids were men would gravitate. Clere was a good fellow—real English oak—and had besides a look of his father at times which the Colonel was fain to confess had endeared the boy to his own heart. Yes; this was a good thing for Clere.

And still, while acknowledging the goodness of it loyally, the father could not quite hold back regret. If only Judy could have loved his own lad!

When the lovers finally appeared, and had been nourished, it was arranged that they, in company with Cartwright, should return homeward, camping for the dark hours at a *jacal* by the wayside, and deploying to leave Judy at her own home. The Colonel would ride out to Fort Twilight to look after his son, and let his movements for the next few days be determined by the state of Tom's wound. St. John could explain everything satisfactorily at Marsh Mallow, and see that Mrs. Mejares got no alarm.

While the younger men saddled up, Judy



was left alone with the Colonel, who took both her hands and spoke words that brought the warm blood to her cheek with gratification and pride. Then he bent his stately white head and kissed her forehead, in fatherly fashion, speaking of his nephew in terms of earnest affection.

"You were quite right to come, my lass," he said, cordially. "I see how it is. Clere's a fine man—a man in a thousand, as was his father before him. He'll make a true, faithful husband, one to lean on and look up to, and that's as much as any woman need wish."

They rode home very quietly, not pressing the horses, and Judy found to her great contentment that her father had not returned, and that Mrs. Mitchel and the baby were still in possession. She had many questions to answer, but patience for all—only it was to black-eyed Maria, the *vaquero's* pretty sweetheart, that the fullest information was given.

The Colonel did not return for a week, owing to some inflammation in Tom's wound, which made it advisable to keep it under the surgeon's eye for a few days. His son re-

turned with him, and was straightway erected into a hero by his sister Anne, and petted and fussed over from daylight until dark. The young sinner had the grace to be ashamed of himself, and, although he acknowledged that salutary frame of mind to no one, there was something in his expression and tone, when he thanked Mejares for the brotherly promptness with which he had come to his aid, which caused that subtle delineator of character to affirm afterwards to his wife that he truly believed Tom would end by being a credit to them after all.

How much of his son's wildness Colonel Lawless knew or suspected he confided to no one; but he suddenly made the discovery that a change would refresh him, ere he should settle down into old age and grandfatherhood. He proposed to his son that they should go abroad together.

"I want a taste of the breeze as it blows over Dartmoor," he said, "with the salt of the sea and the bloom of the heather in it. I want to fish once again in Hatherleigh water, and wander about the fells, and track the Taw to its cradle between Cawsand and Yes-

tor. I want to hold heather in my hand, and hear the golden plover scream overhead. I'm homesick for England, my lad! Come away with me, when Anne shall be through her trouble, and let's wander together amid the old sights, in the old places."

And so it was decided.

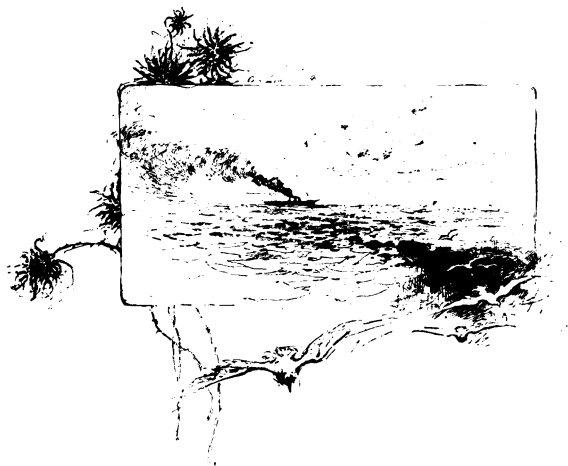
XVIII

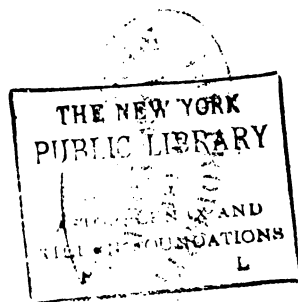
DURING the interim St. John had a talk with his uncle, and stated the condition of his affairs in very plain language, ending with an exposition of his plans and hopes in regard to securing a position as ranch manager.

"I'm fit for this sort of work," he averred frankly, "and I'm not fit for much else. Added to which I'm past thirty years old, and wish to get married."

The Colonel listened kindly, and promised to give the matter his best attention. For reasons of his own he took his son into confidence and consultation, and in less than a week informed St. John that he thought they had found something that might suit him.

An English eccentric, named Dudley, owner of a good ranch and well stocked, with the unrest of his nation, had wearied of the monotony of ranch life in Texas, and wished to





betake himself to Bolivia, there to experiment in minerals. His Texas property was now in the market, and arrangements might be made, the Colonel thought, by which St. John could secure it.

The upshot of the matter was that the Colonel and his nephew started for their compatriot's ranch the next day, and there entered into negotiations which resulted in the turning over of the entire outfit to St. John, the Colonel advancing the purchase-money and taking a lien on the property.

To his son-in-law, later, the old gentleman justified his kindness to St. John in a characteristic fashion.

"That French Yankee over yonder will come down handsomely for his daughter," he averred. "You just watch him. I couldn't let my brother Tom's lad crow small before him, hanged if I could. Not while love of old England warms my heart, and recollection of Yellow Tavern, and the Wilderness, and Appomattox rankles in my memory. No, sir! I'll see him on this deal, whether I can go him one better or not."

Lady Wolcott wrote Judy the most de-

licious of letters, which tickled that young lady's vanity immensely.

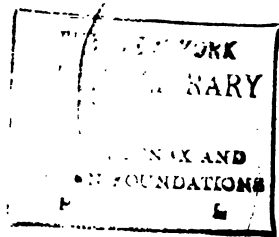
"Fancy my being sister-in-law to a 'ladyship,'" she laughed, gleefully; "it's just like a novel."

Whereupon St. John, of course, assured her that she was fit to be sister-in-law to a queen.

His sister's epistle to him he tore up, and kept its contents to himself. And when, a few days after its receipt, Judy gave him a piece of domestic intelligence, he grinned exceedingly.

"My father is going to be married again," Judy informed him. "Isn't it droll, after our having discussed it that day? He informed me, with blushes, last night, and assured me 'twas the only thing that reconciled him to losing me. She is a very nice lady, he says; tall and handsome, and not disgusting young for him, or a widow. She's a native Texan, and lives in Dallas. He met her in Rosalita, where she was visiting friends, more than a year ago, and has corresponded with her since, and been to her home. She's back in Rosalita now, and I've promised to let him take me to call, and entertain her here





afterwards. Dear old father! I hope he'll be happy and well taken care of. This makes me comfortable about leaving him."

St. John displayed the requisite interest, and said everything that was congratulatory and kind. Going home afterwards, he slapped his thigh with his hand resoundingly, and chuckled with delight.

"Long division, by Jupiter!" he grinned. "Just as I dreamed! Poor Maudie! But isn't this a grand sell—for her!"

THE END





1. The first group of people who are not in the labor force are those who are not in the labor force because they are not in the labor force. This group is the largest group of people who are not in the labor force.

JUL 21 1941

[Handwritten signature]

